

“Secret Language” in Oral and Graphic Form: Religious-Magic Discourse in Aztec Speeches and Manuscripts

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Introduction

On the eve of the conquest, oral communication dominated Mesoamerican society, with systems similar to those defined by Walter Ong (1992 [1982]), Paul Zumthor (1983), and Albert Lord (1960 [2000]), although a written form did exist. Its limitations were partly due to the fact that it was used only by a limited group of people (Craveri 2004:29), and because the Mixtec and Nahua systems do not totally conform to a linear writing system.¹

These forms of graphic communication are presented in pictographic manuscripts, commonly known as codices. The analysis of these sources represents an almost independent discipline, as they increasingly become an ever more important source for Mesoamerican history, religion, and anthropology. The methodology used to study them largely depends on how the scholar defines “writing.” Some apply the most rigid definition of a system based on the spoken language and reflecting its forms and/or structures (e.g., Coulmas 1996:xxvi), while others accept a broader definition of semasiographic systems that can transmit ideas independent of actual spoken language (yet function at the same logical level) and thus also constitute writing (e.g., Sampson 1985:26-31).

The aim of this study is to analyze the linguistic “magical-religious” register of the Nahua people, designated as such because it was used for communication with the sacred realm. In this respect, it represents one of the “sacred languages,” as classified by Zumthor (1983:53). Since such registers are less liable to change, they permit the reconstruction—although always imperfectly—of this type of speech as it existed immediately prior to the arrival of the Europeans and in addition the decipherment of (at least some) of the characteristic elements of Nahua oral

¹ As Mercedes Montes de Oca has aptly commented, “the code that appears in the codices does not claim to represent the linearity of a chain of speech, but instead gives structure to a number of speech fragments, which can be reorganized by the reader according to a defined conceptual order” (2000:426). In this work, however, I do not wish to enter into a discussion as to whether the method of graphic communication used by the Aztecs (similar to the one used by the Mixtecs) did or did not constitute writing. It is important to indicate that Mesoamerican researchers hold different opinions concerning this problem and the solutions they accept also determine the methodology that they employ. To the reader who is interested in analyzing the current points of view, I recommend Oudijk 2008 and Batalla Rosado 2008b.

tradition. In the discussion that follows we develop a hypothesis, namely that in the Mesoamerican codices that focus on calendar-religious subjects, in other words on matters strictly linked to the supernatural world, a similar magical-religious register should be evident. Far from considering the information presented in these sources as resulting from the direct transcription of oral language, my idea is that the graphic form represents elements emblematic of orality, although adapted to this particular context for expression.

Magical-Religious Discourse

The magical-religious speech of the Nahua is one of the ceremonial and esoteric languages described by Zumthor as “sacred,” “erudite,” or “poetic.” Referring to the Mesoamerican context in particular, Alfredo López Austin (1967:1) termed these as “magical,” whereas Maarten Jansen (1985:3) described them as “divine languages.” Jansen demonstrates that this type of language, *iya*, also existed in Mixtec culture and was remarkable for its “metaphors and elegant expressions” (7-10). At the present time these expressions continue to be used in ritual discourse, for example in the Mixtec *sahu* (López García 2007; Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2008:88) and in the *yectlatolli*, “formal speech” of the Nahua from Puebla and the State of Mexico (Peralta Ramírez 2004:175).

Without doubt, there also existed a similar form of ceremonial speech among the Maya. In the colonial-era book entitled *Chilam Balam de Chumayel* (CHBCH 2002:78-89, 112-19), a “figurative language” is described, termed “of Suyua Tan,” the understanding of which was obligatory for those assuming the position of leader. The candidate’s knowledge of it was tested by means of a contest headed by a representative from the supreme authority, the *halach uinic*, and was carried out periodically in certain dominions in post-classical Yucatan. The challenge consisted of interpreting certain riddles, expressed in figurative language, which shrouded “a secret code, even more exclusive than any common metaphor” (Rivera Dorado, in CHBCH 2002:78).²

One of the most famous riddles included in this Mayan book asks for “an old nurse maid to care for the *milpa* (maize patch), her whole body black, her rear of seven palms”³ (*ibid.*:89): the answer is a squash. Almost the same riddle appears in Toltec culture, where the only difference is that it asks for a woman with hips four palms wide (*HTCH* 1989:133ff.; Jansen 1985:5). In the Aztec sources, specifically in the *Florentine Codex* by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, there is also a section dedicated to riddles, proverbs, sayings, and “metaphors” (Sahagún *CF* 1950-82:vi, 217-40). All this evidence confirms that a certain similarity exists among these “divine” or esoteric expressions in different Mesoamerican cultures. This correspondence is all the more logical when one realizes that the riddles are based

² Some years ago Brian Stross (1983) suggested that this language did not constitute a particular register of Yucatec Maya language, but rather constituted a Mixe-zoque language used by the elite. A similar suggestion was made by Evangelina Arana (cf. Jansen 1985:4) about the Mixtec *iya* register, considering it to be a distinct Otomi language. As research has advanced, it is now known that in these and in other cases we are dealing with a particular register constructed on the basis of a common language (Jansen 1985:5; López Austin 1967:1).

³ All the translations to English are mine, unless otherwise stated.

on a metaphorical pun (Colli 1991 [1975]:59), and in the Mesoamerican context there undoubtedly exist common conceptual nuclei (Montes de Oca 2000:402-22; Mikulska 2008a: 58-60; cp. Jansen 1985).

It can be deduced from the information in the *Chilam Balam de Chumayel* that the “Zuyua language” was a register exclusive to the Maya intellectual elite or the initiated few. In the Nahuatl culture, this language was termed *nahuallatolli*, and existed along with other registers found in the Nahuatl language, both *tecpillatolli* or the language of the nobles as well as *macehuallatolli* or popular language (López Austin 1967:1; Jansen 1985:6). *Tecpillatolli*, according to the *Vocabulario* of Fray Alonso de Molina (1950 [1871]), signified “concise and elegant speech or reasoning” and was the exclusive means of expression used by noblemen in ceremonial discourse or even in prayer compositions, which are generally known as *huehuetlatolli*.⁴ These sorts of expressions are noteworthy for their very frequent appearance in proverbs (*tlatlatolli*), riddles (*zazanilli*), and metaphors (*machiotlatolli*) (cp. Jansen 1985:6).

The *Nahuallatolli*

Of all the codes described above, the *nahuallatolli* is the most complicated, although as Jansen has pointed out, “*nauallatolli* and *tecpillatolli* are differentiated in terms of context, but not in terms of principles” (1985:6). The precise name *nahuallatolli* (formed from the root words *nahual-* and *tlatolli*) does not appear as such in the sources, but other words whose parts relate to the roots mentioned do appear. Thus Molina explains the verb *naualittoa* (noun *nahual-* and verb *ittoa*) as meaning to “cautiously say something, in order to take in or deceive others”; and the *nauallattoa* (noun *nahual-* with indefinite object *-tla-* and verb *ittoa*) as “to speak with caution or feign something.” Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón, the famous chronicler of and commentator on spells, whose book *Tratado de las supersticiones* includes the most significant record of incantations, observed that “they always attempt to disguise things with metaphorical words, or *nahualtocaitl*, which means the language or terms used by sorcerers” (1953 [1892]:124). The word *nahualtocaitl* is composed from *nahual-* and *tocaitl*, this second noun meaning “name” (Molina 1980 [1571]).

In my opinion, greater clarity concerning the global meaning of all these words, which integrate the root word *nahual-*, will help in the understanding of this term. *Nahualli* is the name given to a “sorcerer” or man with supernatural power,⁵ about whom many articles have been

⁴ The *huehuetlatolli*—“story or ancient tale,” “tale of the ancestors,” “ancient discourse,” and “archaic word” (García Quintana 2000:129, 133-34), or even “words of the old people” or “expressions of the aged ones / of our forebears” (Sullivan 1986:17)—were speeches made by priests, leading ancient noblemen, those who accompany the leader, elders, merchants, craftsmen, doctors, midwives, and spiritual healers (García Quintana 2000:134; Sullivan 1986:10). They were used on certain special occasions, such as religious celebrations, ascendance to the throne, diplomatic missions, choosing a wife, choosing a midwife, and so forth.

⁵ Molina (1980 [1571]:fol. 63v) provides only the translation “witch.” It is notable that he records this noun in the feminine form, even though the distinction between masculine and feminine genders did not exist in Nahuatl. Without doubt, the explanation lies in the colonial perception of the Mesoamerican sacred realm.

written (yet the subject is not exhausted).⁶ However, the principal characteristic of this individual lies in his capacity to transform himself into another being or phenomenon, for example a ball of fire (López Austin 1996 [1980]:i, 422). Jacinto de la Serna, who transcribed the work by Ruiz de Alarcón, adding his own comments (and information from the contemporary State of Mexico), explains that “this Mexican word *Nahualli* is made up of and takes its meaning from the verb *Nahualtia*, which means to hide, by covering, or disguising, or transforming oneself” (1953 [1892]:90), and in another context that “*Nahualtia* [signifies] to disguise oneself” (203). In my opinion, this set of observations helps clarify the basic meaning of the root word *nahual-*, which means to transform, convert, transfigure, disguise, re-clothe, mask oneself, conceal, camouflage, and finally to trick.

Nahuallatolli was the “language of the sorcerers” (Jansen 1985:6) and the “principal credential for validating a person’s entry into the powerful, ethereal realm” (López Austin 1967:1) as he transforms himself into a *tlamacazqui*.⁷ In the context of incantations, the word *tlamacazqui* alludes to all the recipients of these chants (for example, water and the goddess of water), but at the same time it also refers to the sorcerer himself. Jacinto de la Serna (1953/1892) translates this word in the seventeenth century into Spanish as *espiritado* (“possessed”), a word that today has more the meaning of “charmed,” “bewitched,” or “possessed by the divine spirit.” In effect, themes presented in the texts included incantations, prayers, prophecies, invocations, chants, entreaties, orations, and expressions of gratitude—all themes related to the sacred/supernatural context. This language was the sacred word—a bridge for communication with the deities (Craveri 2004:54)—and as such it pertains to the repertoire of oral tradition and possesses its characteristic features. Among those elements commonly found in *nahuallatolli* discourse, various traits stand out, for example parallelisms and communicative redundancy (an abundance of nouns, verbs, deictics, and so on), as well as syntactic coordination and strategies for composing units of meaning (cf. Ong 1992 [1982]:62-77). In Craveri’s words, “it is probable that each poet would have a repertoire of formulas, suitable for different communicative contexts” (2004:43).

As a variation on oral expression, *nahuallatolli* or “disguised language” is formed from a base material consisting of “more diverse metaphoric procedures: as the divine being to whom it is directed is identified through personification, kinship, locality, or the physical characteristics attributed to him, his position in the divine calendar, or his mythological identity, etc.” (Jansen 1985:6). Thus the incantations apply the following names to fire:

- As relating to kinship: *in nota*: “my father” (Ruiz de Alarcón 1953 [1892]:150); *yn tihuehue*, *in tiyllama*: “you elderly man and you elderly woman” (141); *nopilhuan*: “my children” (when referring to flames; cp. López Austin 1967:7)
- Calendar name: *nahui acatl*: “Four Reed” (Ruiz de Alarcón 1953 [1892]:135)

⁶ Authors who should be mentioned include López Austin (1996:i, 416-30), Aguirre Beltrán (1963:98-114, 223-26), Musgrave-Portilla (1982), and lastly Martínez González (2006:39-63); many other researchers have also treated this subject, making important contributions.

⁷ A term for a pre-Hispanic priest; literally, “he who gives/offers something.” Taking into account their role as intermediaries between the divine and human world, it seems to be more accurate to regard these priests’ function as handing over to men gifts coming from the gods and to the gods, those which men give (cp. Gruzinski 2001:164).

- Metaphors relating to physical features: *tzoncoztli*: “blond/yellow hair” (135); *tzoncoçahuiztica*: “the Yellow-reddish-haired One” (150); *ayauhtli itzon, poctli itzon*: “Hair like Smoke, Hair like Mist” (113); *milintica*: “(that which) is undulating/wavy/swirling” (135, 150); *xiuhтли coçauhqui milintica*: “yellow flames that are swirling” (78; cp. López Austin 1967:6-7).

Given that this is a “secret,” “disguised,” and “concealed” language, it is polysemic: the same term may refer to a number of different beings (López Austin 1967:4). This is more evident in the case of names—or titles—referring to kinship, but also in other examples; for instance, the name *xoxouhqui cihuatl*, “the green woman,” refers both to water and to the wind; *iztac cihuatl*, “the white woman,” to copal (resinous incense), to water, to a sown land area, or to a variety of herbal medicines; and, as we have already observed, water may be referred to both by the expression *xoxouhqui cihuatl*, “the green woman,” and as *iztac cihuatl*, “the white woman” (cp. López Austin 1967:iv, 7-8). This lack of precision and inherent ambiguity increases secrecy and enhances the possibility of not being understood by all people, a very important quality pertaining to magical language. As Bronisław Malinowski comments when analyzing the magical language of the Trobriand islanders, “this concerns words which are formally devoid of meaning (1987 [1935]:347)” or “at least deformed” in some way (389). In addition, they are “very mysterious words, unrelated to daily speech” (354). Nevertheless, he also specified that “this does not mean that they lack significance” (369), since “they are devoid of meaning only when we are distracted by the superficial deformities, characteristic of the truncated and extraordinary style of magic language” (393), whereas “beneath the esoteric disguise are to be found linguistic connotations and links to everyday language” (371).

This confirms by analogy that *nahuallatolli*, as the “Zuyua language” of the *Chilam Balam de Chumayel*, was a linguistic register used by the chosen few, the “initiated” or intellectual elite. As Malinowski affirms, the magical tone is acquired by applying formulas—“magic language relies on disguising the full meaning of esoteric and mysterious terms” (*ibid.*: 374)—and results from using “certain linguistic devices,” such as metaphors (“going from relatively simple modifications . . . to extremely complex alterations and free rhetoric in the use of intermediate and derivative meanings”), oppositions, repetitions, negative comparisons, orders and questions with answers, and words used erroneously in terms of grammar or morphology, “sung according to a specific phonology, rhythm and with the repetition of certain permanent complexes of words” (359, 368, 355, 369). The magical formulas of *nahuallatolli* include diverse figures of speech or rhetorical expressions⁸ in terms of their style, among which the following stand out: metaphors (“blond/yellow hair” for “fire”), metonyms (“nine times rubbed in the hands” for “tobacco”), synecdoche (“the *cimates*,⁹ the sweet potato” to indicate nutritious plants; Ruiz de Alarcón 1953 [1892]:89), antonyms (the proper name “Four Reed” for “fire”),

⁸ López Austin argues that “no space is assigned to rhetoric, thus the figure of speech becomes a magical instrument” (1967:4). My opinion is that this is true if considered from a functional perspective (if one accepts that the function of these discourses is magical); however, from a formal perspective we are treating a considerable number of examples of rhetoric.

⁹ Michael D. Coe and Gordon Whittaker comment that this “is clearly a leguminous plant with a large, round root” (1982:152-53).

paraphrase (“yellow flames that are swirling”), and diphrasisms,¹⁰ all of these being very common tools in Mesoamerican languages. An example of diphrasisms used with reference to “fire” is *yn tihuehue, in tiyllama*: “you elderly man, you elderly woman,” referring to the ancestor(s) (cp. Montes de Oca 2000:157).

Moreover, in regard to previous comments describing the characteristics of oral expression, the *nahuallatolli* is renowned for its multiple repetitions, parallel meanings, and communicative redundancy. As an example of these features, in the following I present invocations to the earth used in different spells, illustrating the continual amplification of the units of meaning (Ruiz de Alarcón 1953 [1892]):

. . . <i>cetochtli aquetzimani</i> (125)	“One Rabbit [calendar name] [that] extends itself with its head upwards”
. . . <i>çe tochtli àquetzamani,</i> tlaximixtlapachtlaça (162)	“One Rabbit [that] extends itself with its head upwards, <i>lying face down</i> ”
citlalcueye [...] nonan <i>cetochtli</i> <i>àquetzamani</i> (120)	“ <i>Star-skirted One, my mother</i> One Rabbit [who] extends herself with the head facing upwards”
<i>nonan tlateuctli aquetzamani,</i> nota <i>cetochtli</i> (105)	“my mother <i>Ruler of the Earth</i> , [who] stretches out with her head facing upwards, <i>my father</i> One Rabbit”
<i>nonan cetochtli àquetzamani ye</i> <i>nican ticyocoyaz</i> xoxouhqui coacihuiztli (134-35)	“my Mother One Rabbit [who] extends her head upwards, <i>here you will create a blue-green disease</i> [metaphorical name for gout or palsy]”

¹⁰ Diphrasisms are linguistic forms composed from two or more juxtaposed lexemes where the meaning “is not derived from the sum of the parts, but instead indicates a third meaning” (Montes de Oca 1997:31) and “the relationship between these two terms can be viewed as opposition, synonym, or complementarity” (2000:36). The same author also indicates that diphrasisms are formed through a more specific process than that of parallel meanings (2000:22-23), given that the lexemes in the former are syntactically identical (25). She also differentiates between diphrasisms formed on the basis of metaphor and those formed on the basis of metonym (115-28; cp. Craveri 2004:64-65).

<i>nonan tlathecuintli,</i> <i>notà cetochtli</i> tezc atl, yncan hualpopocatimani, nohueltiuh cenmalinalli (77)	“My mother, <i>Earth thumper</i> , my father One Rabbit, <i>mirror emitting smoke</i> , <i>my elder sister One Twisted</i> <i>Grass</i> ”
<i>nonan tlatheuctli,</i> <i>nota ce tochtli</i> <i>tezc atl, çan huel popocatimani.</i> Ma mixco nonmayauh (80)	“My mother Ruler of the Earth, my father One Rabbit, mirror emitting smoke <i>Let me fall upon your</i> <i>face</i> ” ¹¹
tlalli yxcapaniltzin, àmo tinechelehuiz, <i>ce tochtli</i> <i>àquetztimani,</i> ca nican tzintlapan; nican elpachi <i>cètochtli àquetztimani</i> (69)	“ <i>Earth, cracked in the face,</i> <i>do not desire to [injure] me,</i> One Rabbit [who] extends its head upwards, <i>For here has been broken,</i> <i>here has been sated</i> ¹² One Rabbit [who] extends its head upwards”

Each incantation is augmented with a new expression (in the translation this is marked with italics), and the organization of these “groups” of meanings is quite free, depending on the way they are pronounced (one of the important characteristics of oral tradition; cf. Lord 1975:65-68), and in the last example communicative accumulation and redundancy are evident. As Malinowski puts it (1987 [1935]:369), “little by little we progress from a few simple modifications of everyday speech, to ever more complex deviations and the rhetorical liberty to develop intermediates and derivatives.”

Graphic Register

The principal objective of this work, as already stated, is to ascertain whether a parallel register—a secret language—also exists in graphic form. In 1985 Maarten Jansen contributed to this subject, providing specific examples of expressions particular to the *iya*, graphically

¹¹ This line is Coe and Whittaker’s translation (1982:136).

¹² These two lines are Coe and Whittaker’s translation (1982:118).

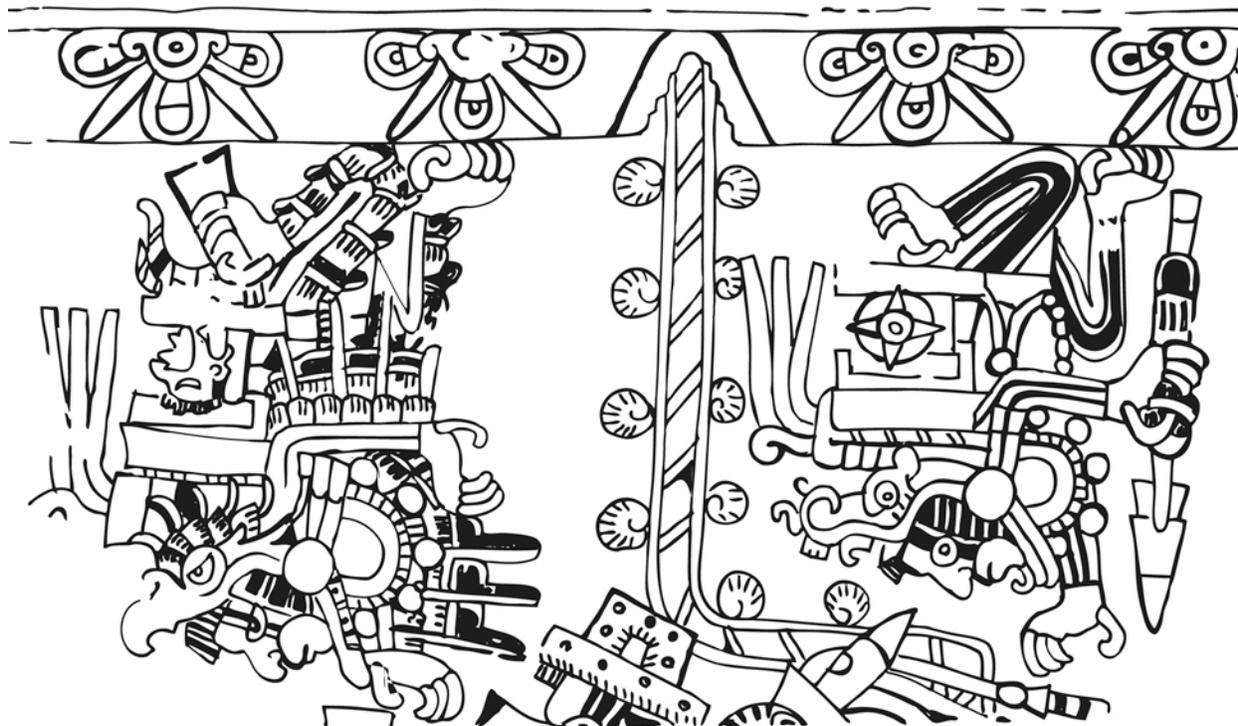


Fig. 1. Priests in array of eagle and fire serpent. *Vindobonensis Codex* (lam. 48). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

represented in the Mixtec codices. Thus the phrase *yocovui huico yuvuiya* in Mixtec normally means “to celebrate the fiesta of the mat,” whereas in the *iya* it means “to get married”; and in the *Vindobonensis Codex* (35) the image of the mat with the ground tobacco and a cup of chocolate form part of the representation of marriage. Another example: *yaha yahui* in Mixtec normally means “eagle, fire serpent” but in the *iya* “powerful sorcerer,” which is a priestly title using the terms of the colonial era. In the codices *Vindobonensis* (48; **fig. 1**) and *Selden* (12), the eagle and serpent of fire represent precisely this second meaning (Jansen 1985:10).

Referring to the Central Mexican area, Janet Berlo (1989:19, 33-34) has suggested that puns, metaphors, and metonyms are frequently present in the “embedded texts”¹³ from Xochicalco. Similarly, Doris Heyden has provided examples of metaphors transmitted in visual form, noting that “every line, form, color, and design in each example of artistic expression related a message” (1986:40) and “one metaphor frequently led to another, forming a chain of references” (37). In 1994 Patrick Johansson observed that in the Nahuatl codices, apart from the pictorial and phonetic modality, “a wide range of figures of speech exist at a pictographic level, the majority presented involuntarily as they are inherent in the adopted system” (303), providing an example of each rhetorical device: metonym, synecdoche, accumulation, pleonasm, and expletive (303-05). Similarly, Montes de Oca (2000:428-59) has provided examples of metaphors or visual tropes from different types of codices, compiling a considerable sample of diphrasisms represented by images. Some of these are very well known, for example *in atl in tepetl* [water, hill]: “city,” *in petlatl in icpalli* [mat, seat]: “authority,” *in mitl yn chimalli* [arrow,

¹³ A term introduced by this researcher (Berlo 1983:11-18) in order to define signs used in glyphic writing (for example the year symbol or *meyotli*) that are perfectly incorporated within the image.

shield]: “war,” *in cueitl in huipilli* [skirt, blouse]: “woman,” *in maxtlatl in tilmatli* [items of male clothing]: “man” (430-37, 441-43).

These pictorial expressions are so inherent in the adapted system that Johansson affirms that their comprehension becomes unconscious and automatic (1994:303), although the contemporary researcher does note diphrasisms represented in graphic form. Other examples provided by Montes de Oca (438-41, 446-50) are, however, less well known, such as *in ixtli in yollotl* [eye/face,¹⁴ heart]: “human being,” *in maitl in icxitl* [hand, foot]: “human being,” *in tlemaitl in copalli* [incense burner, copal]: “offering” but also “priest,” *in acxoyatl in huiztli* [objects used in self-sacrifice: branches of a tree, maguey spines]: “self-sacrifice.” What is notable is that these less frequently used diphrasisms are in some way related to the sacred realm—whether this in the context of calendar-religious codices or in cult objects such as sculptures or ceremonial objects—a fact that in my opinion confirms that the register used here is different from that of “everyday language.” In the case of the calendar-religious codices, I believe that it cannot be maintained that the most elaborate visual tropes used in these are unconscious; on the contrary, I think they are employed purposefully to the same end as when the *nahuallatolli* register is used in the spoken context.¹⁵

Research referring to an “esoteric” or visual code is also being undertaken in the context of Maya writing (cp. Craveri 2004:73-77; Arzápalo Marín 1999). There is a notable difference concerning the method for transmitting graphical information when compared to the Nahuatl: Maya fulfills the requirements of a writing system more strictly (see Batalla Rosado 2008a:177), in that it comprises a logo-syllabic system written in a linear way¹⁶ that includes verbs, subjects, objects, and other components of the sentence.¹⁷ In its oral form, Maya sacred language is replete

¹⁴ The word *ixtli* may refer to either “an eye” or “a face” (López Austin 1991:319-25).

¹⁵ The similarity between “graphic discourse” and the *nahuallatolli* has also been a subject for contemplation, taken up by both Johansson (2004:44) and Elisabeth Hill Boone (2007:4).

¹⁶ Although Martel and López de la Rosa observe that “the Maya writing system is neither predominantly logo-syllabic nor grapheme-phonetic” (2006:99).

¹⁷ As already indicated, a rule of linearity cannot basically be applied to the Nahuatl-Mixtec system, except in the case of calendar counts and the “reading” *a grosso modo* of the “chapters” of the codices (I refer to the pre-Hispanic ones). In other words, the central thread of information presented in these sources is organized horizontally (from left to right or the reverse), and vertically (frequently from bottom to top) or in boustrophedon form (cp. Batalla Rosado 2008a:179). Nevertheless, when a particular image is presented (cf. *Borgia Codex*, 29, **fig. 13**), this has to be observed in its totality. A good example of this lack of “complete” linearity is found in the toponym glyphs (for example, those appearing in pre-Hispanic monuments such as the Tizoc Stone, in the *Matricula de Tributos* codex or even in the colonial *Mendoza Codex*). Even if toponyms may be considered examples of “true writing” (according to the narrowest definition, cp. Prem 1979:104-05, 1992:54; Prem and Riese 1983:170), the order for reading the constituent parts is not well defined (a fact stressed a number of times by Prem and Riese); thus the reader is required to make a “global” analysis of this sign. An example of this phenomenon is provided by Batalla Rosado (2008a:180): a toponym formed by the logogram for a shield, *chimalli*, and a phonetic sign, drawn in the form of a flag, *pantli*, which gives the phonetic reading of *pan* (a postposition meaning “place of”). This is annotated (in the European writing system) by interpreting this toponym as *Panchimalco* (in the *Matricula de Tributos* codex) and as *Chimalco* (in the *Mendoza Codex*), even though a place called Chimalpa existed and is just as likely to be the correct reading for this toponym. It is also worth pointing out that, according to the most recent research carried out by Lacadena (2008) in the Central Mexican region—referring specifically to the Tetzcoacan tradition—a “branch” of “true” writing was evolving here (or rather one based totally on the forms and structures of oral language), even if not totally similar to the Maya writing system.

with metabras, metataxis and other figures of speech, for example hyperbaton (Arzápalo Marín 1989; 1993:439; 1999). Concerning graphics, Charles Hofling has studied the structure of discourse in a fragment of a lunar table from the *Dresden Codex*, showing the parallels that exist between oral poetic chants and the epigraphic texts, where repetition with variation, reiteration of formulas, and a high redundancy rate may be observed (see Craveri 2004:73). Edmundo López de la Rosa and Patricia Martel have demonstrated the use of rhythm, metric verse, metonym, synonym, hyperbole, allegory, personification, and optative mood in the Maya codices (cf. *ibid.*: 75). Alfonso Lacadena analyzes lithic inscriptions (aside from those found in the codices), and Kerry Hull treats those found on certain stelae and vases, both demonstrating the use of metaphorical forms, parallelism, and lexical pairs (these are also present in contemporary poetry, representing an inheritance from the ritual language of the pre-Hispanic elite). These may be added to the examples previously mentioned (*ibid.*:75-77).

As Arzápalo Marín demonstrates (1999:107), “the written records of religious, scientific, and historical texts constitute a sophisticated task in codification and not just a transcription of the speech of priests and scientists.” The names for this register are *akab ts’ib* or *balam ts’ib*, in contrast to the single word *ts’ib*, which refers only to the act itself of “painting/writing,” and thus must have the same semantic field as *icuiloa* in Nahuatl. The full expressions, *akab ts’ib* or *balam ts’ib*, are translated as an “abbreviation or numeral” (*Vienna Dictionary*, in Arzápalo Marín 1999:107), but it is particularly relevant to observe the significance of these compounds. The word *ts’ib* signifies “to write/to paint” (cp. Arzápalo Marín 1995:215-16; *Diccionario Maya* 2001:882; Stuart 1987), in a way similar to that of the verb *icuiloa* in Nahuatl,¹⁸ a fact that clearly illustrates how this method for transmitting information in the codices was understood, in contrast to our Western tendency to separate writing from image.¹⁹ In addition, the word *aakab* is translated in the *Calepino de Motul* as “night, the night, or of the night; or a dark thing;” the verb *balancunah* as “to hide, to conceal,” whereas *baalan* is “a hidden or concealed thing” (Arzápalo Marín 1999:107). Thus a considerable conceptual similarity can be observed between these terms

¹⁸ Molina (1980 [1571]:fol. 26v) translates the verb *icuiloa* as “to write or paint something,” and the noun *tlacuilolli* as “writing or painting” (fol. 120r). Cp. also the entries *icuiloa* and *tlacuiloa* in the available dictionaries, such as the Great Nahuatl Dictionary (*GND*) by Sybille de Pury and Marc Thouvenot (<http://www.sup-infor.com>), where translations vary not only between “to write” and “to paint,” but also between “to sculpt” and “to carve” (cp. Lockhart 1999 [1992]:594). In fact, the interpretations of *icuiloa* in Nahuatl are very similar to the etymologies for the word “to write” in the Indo-European languages. For example, the Greek γράφειν, “to write,” and the English word *graphic* are the equivalent of *kerben*, “to engrave,” in German. The Gothic *mēljan*, “to write,” must have initially meant “to paint,” since in German the word *malen*, “to paint,” has survived. The Slavic word *pisati* or the Polish *писаć*, “to write,” also initially meant “to paint,” as demonstrated by the connection with the Latin *pingere*, “to paint.” Finally, the most widespread word—in Latin *scribere*, in Spanish *escribir*, in German *schreiben*, in English *scribe*—originally signified to “incise” in English because of its connection with the Greek σκαριφάσθαι, which also has this meaning (Gelb 1963 [1952]:7).

¹⁹ Moreover, in contemporary indigenous languages the term for “to paint” and “to write” continues to be the same verb, or rather two verbs that are very similar. For example, in Tarahumara the verb *osé* means both “to write” as well as “to paint,” whereas among the *popoloca* from Veracruz “to write” is *tunja•yp*, and “to paint” is *tunjimp* (Clark 1995).

in Maya and the *nahual-* root in Nahuatl.²⁰ In fact, in Nahuatl a similar expression also exists, *nahualicuiloa*, that is made up of exactly the same components as *balam ts'ib*, in other words of the *nahual-* root, which refers to something disguised, concealed, transformed, and *icuiloa*, “to paint/to write.” The entire word, *nahualicuiloa*, is translated by Molina as “to write in code, or to write something using a code” (1980 [1571]:fol. 63r), and alongside this entry in the same dictionary appears *tlanaualicuiloliztli*: “code,” and *tlanaualicuilloli*: “coded” (fol. 35r).²¹

The *Huehuetl de Malinalco*

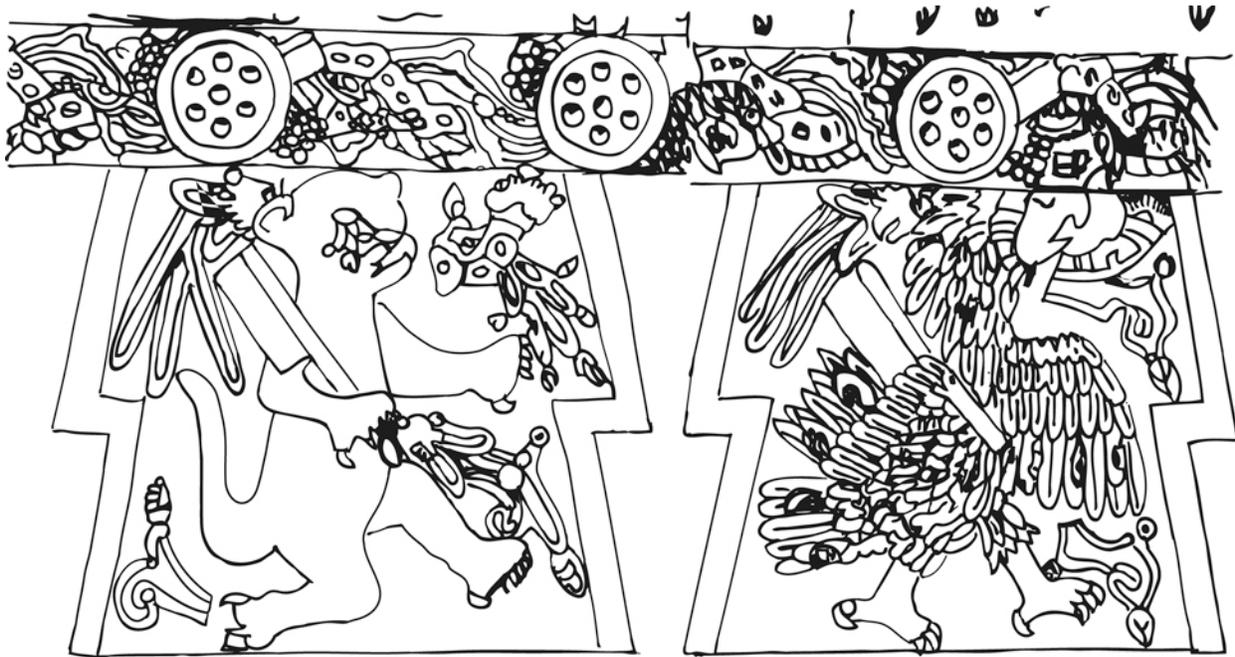


Fig. 2. Drum called *Huehuetl de Malinalco*. Redrawn from Alcina Franch et al. (1992:fig. LXII) by Nadezda Kryvda.

As already indicated, the use of this particular “pictographic” register for the same purpose as the *nahuallatolli* is always restricted to contexts where the theme is in some way related to the sacred and especially to codices of the calendar-religious type (the *tonalamatl*). Nevertheless, in my opinion it also appears in the cult objects, such as statues, recipients, and so on that were used in religious ceremonies. A perfect example is found on a vertical drum named *Huehuetl de Malinalco* (fig. 2), where outstanding abundance (or communicative redundancy) can be observed in terms of the elements conveying meaning. On this object, anthropomorphic

²⁰ It is important to notice that the *nanahualtin*, or supernatural forces, sometimes known by other names, work mostly during the night, undertaking the journey to the supernatural world in dreams (Mikulska 2008a:311-14, 328-34).

²¹ Unfortunately, these words have not been found in this context, making it possible that their use was infrequent or that they were in some way “invented” by the friar.

images of eagles and felines undoubtedly represent graphic images of the lexemes in the diphrasism of *in cuauhtli in ocelotl* [eagle, jaguar-ocelot], whose global meaning would be “warrior,” and, subsequent to metaphorical and metonymic processing, also refers to “war” (Montes de Oca 2000:146-48, 432-33, 449). In front of the faces of these characters are found images in a double spiral of water and fire, referring to the diphrasism *in atl in tlachinolli* [the water, the burnt], whose meaning is also “war” (254, 256-57).



Fig. 3. Symbol of war. *Codex Mendoza* (fol. 4v). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

connection with the term that is lacking. It is also feasible in this case, however, that this dynamic concerns the third expression, *in chimalli in tehuehuelli*, in that the second word refers to a type of shield with circles of feathers, possibly five of these (therefore referring to a shield that is characteristic of, but not exclusive to, the deity Huitzilopochtli; cp. Sahagún *PM facs.* 1993: fols. 261r; 262r, 262v, 265r; Sahagún *CF facs.* 1979:i, 1r; iii:3v; Tovar 2001:xix), or even seven (in this case more characteristic of the deity Tezcatlipoca; cp. Sahagún *PM facs.* 1993: fol. 261r; *CF facs.* 1979:i, 1r; these two gods were intimately related to war).²² In the *Huehuetl de Malinalco* the shields have seven feathers, just as in the representations in the *Mendoza Codex* (fols. 2r, 2v, 3v, 4v, 5v, 7v, 10r, 12r, 13r, 15v), in the part also referring to “war” (fig. 3).

²² Another name for this shield is *ihuiteteyo chimalli*, “shield decorated with feathers” (cp. Sahagún *PM* 1997: fols. 80r, 261r, 262v, 265r; Olko 2005:299). By all accounts it appears that the number of feather rings was not completely uniform, or at least in the colonial pictographic sources this same shield appears either with four rings (*CF facs.* 1979, xii: fols. 30v-32r) or with eight (*Codex Magliabechiano*, fol. 43r); also Tezcatlipoca may carry a shield with five rings (compare Tovar 2001:lam. XXI). Cp. this situation with the *tehuehuelli* entry in the *GDN*.

As if this were insignificant, this same motif appears in the frieze above the marchers, although interspersed with representations of shields, which—thanks to the evident “war” context—undoubtedly are also part of the other diphrasism represented in graphic form. In fact, there may be three diphrasisms here, all signifying “war”; within these three pairs one of the lexemes is *chimalli*, “shield,” whereas the second varies. Thus we have *in mitl in chimalli* [the arrow, the shield], *in chimalli in tlahuiztli* [the shield, the arms], *in chimalli in tehuehuelli* [the shield, the shield] (253-56). On the one hand, if we have here a graphic representation of either of the first two diphrasisms, one might question why no image appears referring to the second lexeme, but Montes de Oca (439) also indicated that at times it is sufficient for only one of these terms to appear because the human mind immediately makes the

Thus in only one object do the graphical representations of lexemes for three diphrasisms appear, all referring to the same concept of “war” and therefore constituting a very good example of communicative accumulation. This same accumulation may appear in oral discourse. In the work by Cristobal del Castillo, in the fragment where Huitzilopochtli goes to the Underworld and speaks to the Lord of that place, Tetzauhteotl, they must be speaking in the special register because this is a case of communication with the divine world. Note that this second individual predicts that the Mexica will be warriors (Castillo 2001[1908]:96-97):

<i>Inic centlamantli huel yehuatl ic</i>	“First thing: that which you receive in
<i>anquimoyollotitiazque</i>	your soul will be
<i>in quauhyotl, in oceloyotl,</i>	[the character of eagles, the character of ocelots],
<i>in teoatl, tlachinolli,</i>	[the sacred water and the burnt],
<i>mitl chimalli</i>	[the arrow and the circular shield].” ²³

***Nahualicuilolli* in the Codices**

I am even more interested in observing the application of the *nahualicuilolli* register in the codices of the calendar-religious type than in the other tridimensional objects. The function of these codices was to elucidate not only the calendar but also—and above all—the divine forces that oversee particular periods of time,²⁴ omens, and the corresponding destinies, or rather all that a *tlamatini tlapouhqui* (“sage, accountant [of days]/ fortune teller”) discovers on entering the supernatural world. As Jansen explains (2002:285), “the pictographic mode of the religious books” is “prescriptive,” implying that it does not consist of an account of what happened as in the historical codices, but rather describes the day and the character of the person born that day, thus indicating his destiny (prognosis) and any prescriptive activity (ritual). The example given by the Dutch researcher here is the graphic representation of a burnt temple. In a historic codex this image signifies “conquest,” whereas in a religious codex it indicates the possibility of a conquest (or of being conquered) on a certain day, “with the characteristic ambiguity inherent in ceremonial language” (*idem*).

²³ My translation into English is based on that by Navarrete (Castillo 2001 [1908]).

²⁴ This in fact was the Mesoamerican concept of time: that time was formed or created from the essence of the gods, and should thus be comprehended as “strength-god-time.” In other words, the Mesoamerican cosmos functioned thanks to an eternal struggle between opposing elements (or opposing divine essences), through which time and the “divine” powers were created, so that the form of the god associated with each day came to the earth’s surface at that precise moment in the calendar (López Austin 1995:438, 1996 [1980]:i, 476-95).

Fig. 4. Graphic representation of the diphrasism *in yohualli in ehecatl* (a), compared with the image of night sky (b), and the face of the wind god Ehecatl (c).

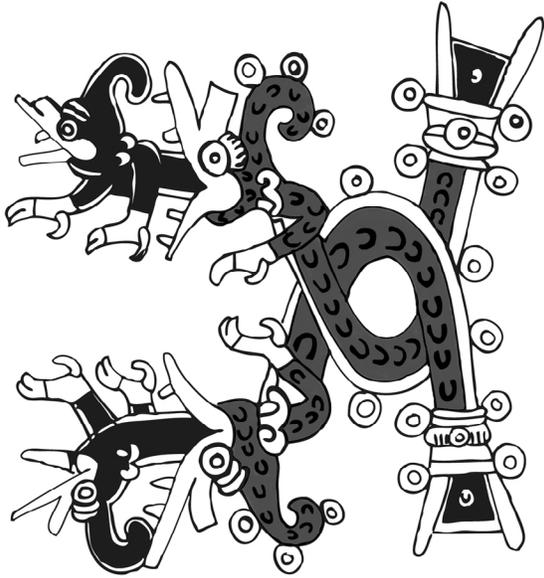


Fig. 4a. *Borgia Codex* (lam. 29). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

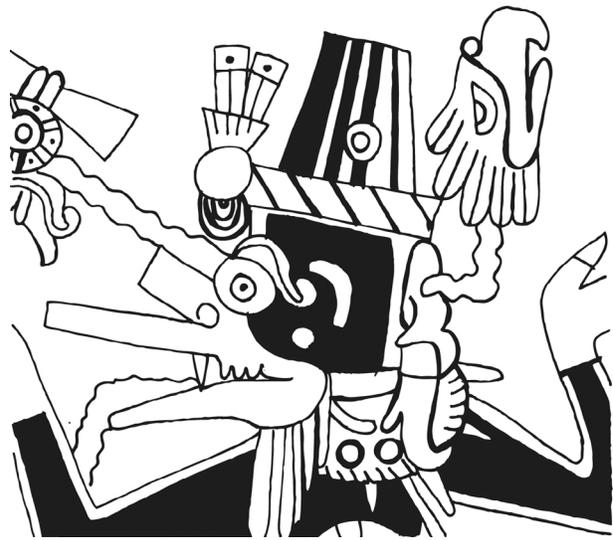


Fig. 4c. *Borgia Codex* (lam. 72). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

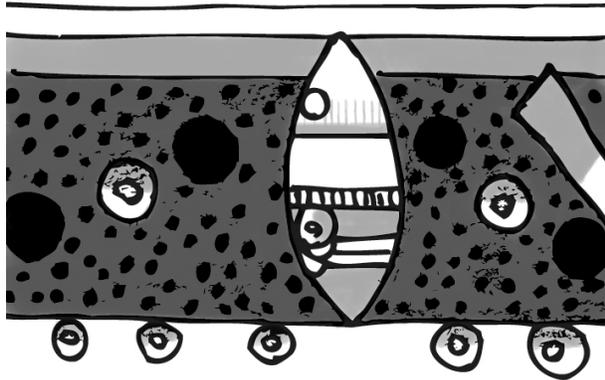


Fig. 4b. *Borgia Codex* (lam. 52). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

As already mentioned, the metaphors and diphrasisms used in *nahuallatolli* and *tepillatolli* were not for daily use. In the same way, it may be expected that the graphic representations corresponding to these expressions will appear in the calendar-religious codices, and that likewise they will not appear in codices treating mundane subjects. Thus the expression *in yohualli in ehecatl* [night, wind], the title applied to superior deities,²⁵ was definitely used only in a religious context. And it appears more frequently in the *huehuetlatolli* compiled in the sixth book of the *Florentine Codex*. Correspondingly, the graphic representation of this abstract diphrasism is only found in the *tonalamatl* (fig. 4a): represented by the bodies of two animals—serpent or lizard-like, painted in the same way as the night, in black or dark grey decorated with a motif of “rings” or “horseshoes” also in black and covered with so-called “starry eyes,” which were signs for stars (cp. fig. 4b). Likewise, the mouths of these abstract beings are the same as the pointed mask distinctive of Ehecatl, the god of wind (fig. 4c). However, concerning this

²⁵ Above all, this concerned the divinity (or a divine couple) known by the names *Tloque Nahuaque* (“Lord of the Nearby, Lord of the Close by”) (Sahagún *CF* 1950-82:vi, 33, 50, 73, 91, 121, 135, 154, 187) or by the title *Totecuio* (“Our Lord”) (vi, 54, 95, 141), even though at times these titles were used with reference to a more concrete god, either *Tezcatlipoca* (vi, 7) or *Mixcoatl* (vi, 34). Cp. Olivier 2004:50-54.

particular image, and lacking a Rosetta Stone, it is clear that we are working from very fragile evidence, especially if my analysis is compared with that of Maarten Jansen. Even though Jansen also identifies this image as “night and wind,” he considers that symbolically it signifies “the immaterial existence of the gods, which are ‘night and wind,’ or in other words invisible, impalpable, mysterious” (1997:76-77).

These two different interpretations are not mutually exclusive, since the most important quality of the supreme deities may consist of their being impalpable and invisible, whereas what interests me is whether their graphic representations allude directly to a semantic group of the linguistic kind, and as such are in fact metaphorical in terms of Paul Ricoeur’s definition,²⁶ or visual/plastic expressions of certain metaphorical concepts such as those defined by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson.²⁷ The “visual diphrasisms” presented throughout this work effectively correspond to linguistic expressions. It cannot be stated definitively, however, that all images of this type in the codices that have semantic shifts correspond to semantic groups of a linguistic type (especially if we accept Lakoff and Johnson’s definition of metaphorical concepts). Besides, once this premise is accepted (that “visual diphrasisms” are always graphic representations of oral expression), then there is a risk of not always capturing their significance. This is why it would be appropriate to give the image-structure a different name here, possibly applying the term *digrafism*.²⁸

Metonyms and Synecdoche

Fig. 5. Different graphic representations of the diphrasism with the meaning of “authority.”



Fig. 5a. Sahagún *Primeros Memoriales facs.* fol. 51r). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

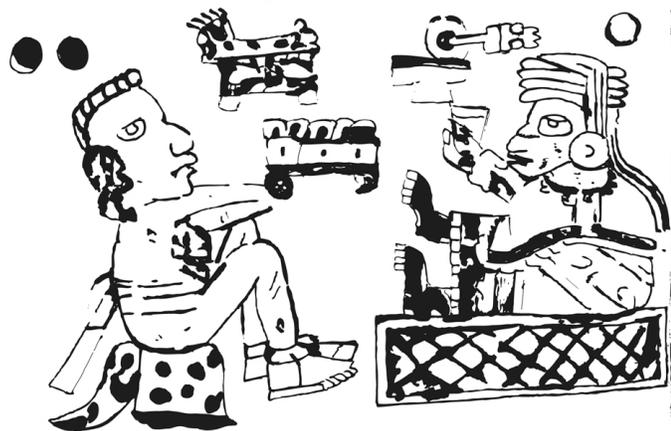


Fig. 5b. *Vaticanus B Codex* (lam. 42). Redrawn by Katarzyna Mikulska Dąbrowska.

²⁶ According to Ricoeur (1978 [1975]:3), “metaphor constitutes a displacement and an extension of the meaning of words,” so that the character of metaphor is basically linguistic (cp. Craveri 2004:28).

²⁷ Lakoff and Johnson (1988 [1980]:25-28) understand *metaphors* to be *metaphorical ideas*: principles organized according to conceptual systems, which at the same time represent mental schemes by which we create metaphorical expressions, popularly known as metaphors.

²⁸ This term resulted from a very fertile discussion about this subject with Michela Craveri and Rogelio Valencia.



Fig. 5c. *Borgia Codex* (lam. 65). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.



Fig. 5d. *Borgia Codex* (lam. 54). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

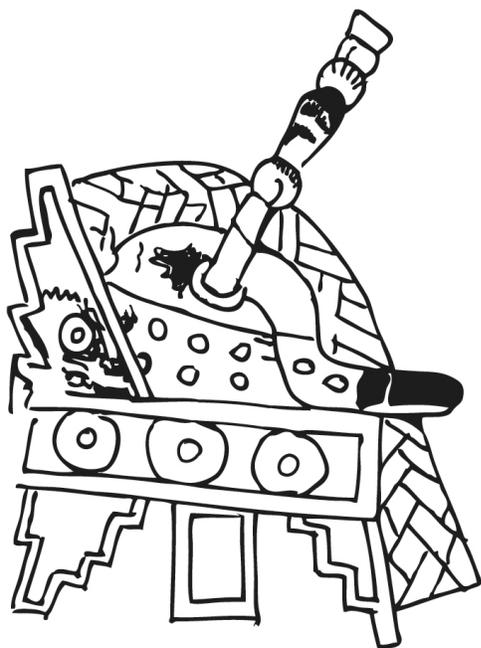


Fig. 5e. *Vaticanus B Codex* (lam. 83). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

Graphic representations of diphrasisms were not restricted to the calendar-religious context, even though they undoubtedly appear more frequently there and are more varied. One of the diphrasisms represented “outside” the *tonalamatl* is the expression mentioned previously, *in petlatl in icpalli* [the mat, the seat], which idiomatically means “authority.” In the graphic version it takes the form of a seat made of matting (compare Sahagún *PM* 1997: fol. 51r; *Xolotl Codex*, 3; *Magliabechiano Codex*, fol. 67r; **fig. 5a**). In some codices of the Borgia Group there can be a jaguar skin instead of the matting (codices *Vaticanus B*, 42; *Borgia*, 65; **fig. 5b, 5c**), although the meaning is the same. But only in the calendar-religious codices can the diphrasisms be applied according to the *nahualicuilolli* rules—where “amplification” of meaning associated with this sign can be observed, as well as its appearance in metonymic form.

In the *Borgia Codex* (54), the diphrasism appears to be accompanying a human figure (**fig. 5d**). The extension of meaning here changes from “authority” to “ruler.” This interpretation is based on three manuscripts that contain similar passages (the *Borgia*, *Vaticanus B*, and *Cospi* codices), where the subject concerns the apparitions of Venus

following her disappearance into the Underworld,²⁹ and the “attacks” on five different entities, with the purpose of releasing any negative energy emanating from the Underworld. The beings attacked by Venus are represented in detail in the codices, and this information can be compared to the sources written in the Latin alphabet. Thus the *Anales de Cuauhtitlán* (Velázquez 1975 [1945]:11) inform us that on days assigned with the *acatl* (“reed”) symbol³⁰ Venus threatens the rulers, information that conforms to that presented in the *Borgia Codex* (fig. 5d). In the *Vaticanus B Codex* (83), however, we have a case of metonymic meaning; although it depicts the seat with the matting the human figure does not even appear (fig. 5e). In the *Cospi Codex* (10) the situation is further complicated. The image of the sun is added to the representation of a seat with a back (painted according to the correct conventions of this manuscript). In Mesoamerica there was a strong link between this star and the supreme leader (Durán 1984 [1967], ii:316; cp. Olivier 2008:275-78), which is why in this case in the pictorial representation we have not only a double example of a “graphic metonym,” but also an accumulation of elements with meaning (which I will discuss in greater detail below). The message would undoubtedly have been complete with either image, whether of the sun or of the throne.

Other examples of metonyms are presented in these same passages. According to the *Anales de Cuauhtitlán* (Velázquez 1975 [1945]:11), in the days marked with the *ollin* symbol (“earthquake”) Venus attacked young men, *alias* warriors. In the *Vaticanus B* (84) and *Cospi* (11;

Fig. 6. Representations of warriors.

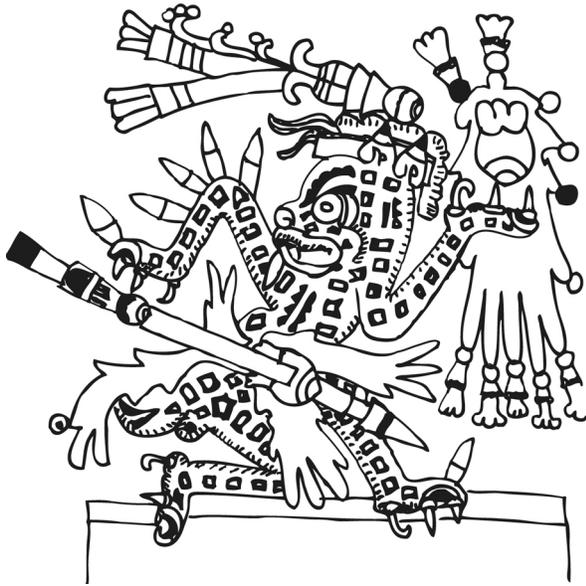


Fig. 6a. As a jaguar. *Cospi Codex* (lam. 11). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

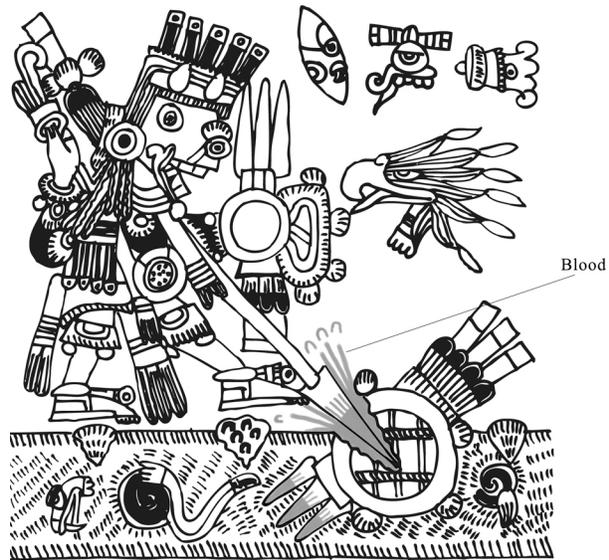


Fig. 6b. As a shield with arrows. *Borgia Codex* (lam. 54). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

²⁹ In other words, it is the moment when Venus reappears in the sky after the 8-day period of invisibility, called the inferior conjunction, which was the phase subsequent to that when Venus appears as the evening star (Anders et al. 1994:244).

³⁰ In Mesoamerica, the “date” consisted of a combination of a number (from 1 to 13) with one of the 20-day symbols, which may be named after animals (such as “dog,” “eagle,” and so on), objects (such as “house” or “knife”), natural phenomena (such as “rain” or “earthquake”), or abstract entities (such as “death”).

fig. 6a) codices, the warriors are represented as jaguars, and in the *Borgia Codex* (54; **fig. 6b)** as a shield with arrows. In both cases the graphic images are representations of diphrasism. In the first case, only one of the two lexemes in the expression *in cuauhtli in ocelotl* [eagle, jaguar] is represented, while in the second both lexemes of the diphrasism *in mitl in chimalli* [arrow, round shield] appear, both making reference to war and/or warriors.

Fig. 7. Graphic representations of the agave goddess Mayahuel.

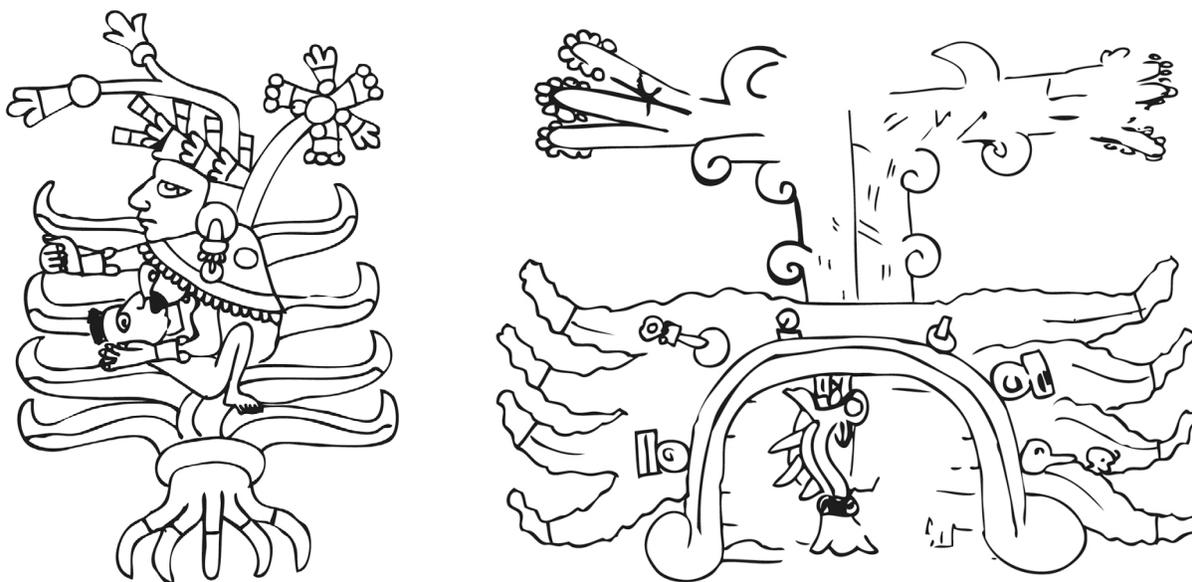


Fig. 7a. *Fejérváry-Mayer Codex* (lam. 28). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda. Fig. 7b. *Vaticanus B Codex* (lam. 40). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

Equally characteristic of the *tonalamatl* books is synecdoche. In another series of parallel fragments in the codices *Borgia* (15-17), *Fejérváry-Mayer* (28-29), and *Vaticanus B* (40-42), four series of five deities are presented at different moments during the birth of a child.³¹ The last of these groups consists of five women who are breastfeeding a newborn. Among them is the goddess of agave, Mayahuel.³² A distinctive feature found in the images of the agave goddess is that she is always sitting on or in front of this plant. It is important to note that if this element is removed the deity represented becomes practically indistinguishable from the goddesses Tlazolteotl or Xochiquetzal (cp. *Borbonicus Codex*, 8; *Borgia Codex*, 49-52). Thus, I believe that the image of agave is an integral part of the representation of Mayahuel and as such can be observed in the manifestations of this mother-goddess in the *Borgia Codex* (16) and *Fejérváry-Mayer Codex* (28; **fig. 7a**). However, in the *Vaticanus B Codex* (40; **fig. 7b**), the figure of the goddess disappears, with only the agave effigy remaining, although here she is breastfeeding not

³¹ See Anders et al. 1993a:109-15; 1993b:239-46; 1994:247-60; Boone 2007:140-41; Batalla Rosado 2008a:361-66; Mikulska 2008a:71, 125.

³² Although considering the relevant data from written sources, it could also be interpreted as an incarnation of the plant itself; Sahagún *CF* 1950-82:ii, 132; *Vaticanus Ríos Codex*, fol. 20v; *Histoire du Mexique* 1985 [1965]: 107; cp. Mikulska 2008a:118, 123-25.

so much a child as a fish. Thus here we have another “visual trope,” surely the same one that appears in the *Borgia Codex* (16).³³

These processes, which follow the same mechanism used to create metonyms and synecdoche, have resulted in the identification of the so-called “god hieroglyphs,” as Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García termed them (1994:141-42), comparing this method of graphic representation with the Maya writing system. In the first eight pages of the *Cospi Codex*, as in other calendar-religious codices, the most important Mesoamerican calendar count is presented: 260 days or *tonalpohualli*. Nevertheless, in contrast to the other *tonalamatl*, in the *Cospi Codex*, to one side of the squares where the symbols of the days are placed, small images of nine gods are depicted, forming another cycle of time, known by the name of “Nine Lords of the Night.” Since this representation takes up a very small physical space, most of them have only their heads illustrated (reduction), but possibly for the same reason—lack of space—the total representation of the head is conveyed by one of its details (synecdoche) or by another sign (which does not appear in the head representation but is closely related to the nature of the god in question), therefore functioning as a metonym.

Fig. 8. “Reduced” images of some deities of the *tonalpohualli* cycle in the *Cospi Codex*.

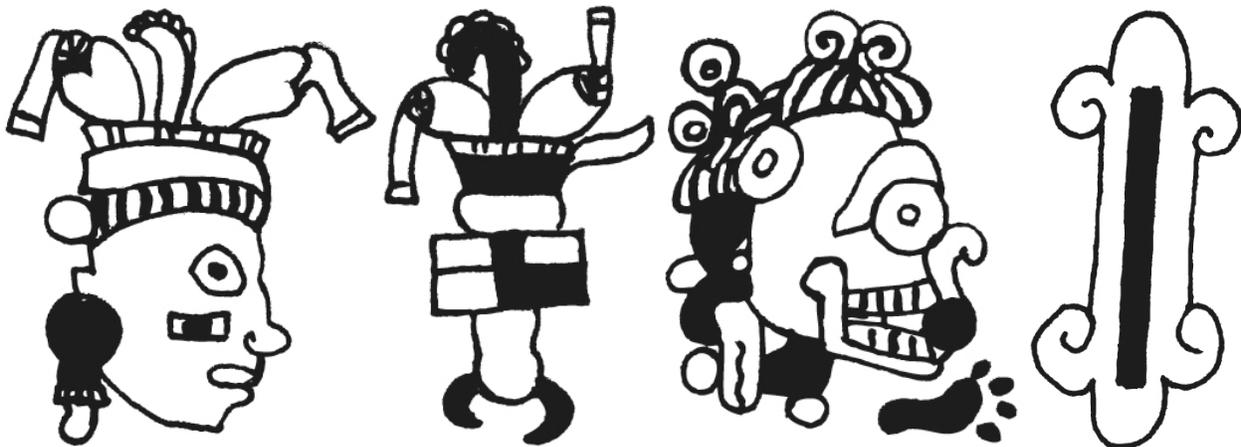


Fig. 8a. The maize god, Centeotl, in an anthropomorphic form (with corn cobs in his headdress) and as a bird claw with corn cobs and maize flowers. *Cospi Codex* (lam. 2). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

Fig. 8b. The god of the Underworld, Mictlantecuhtli, in an anthropomorphic form (as a skull) and as an image of a large bone. *Cospi Codex* (lam. 7). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

Thus the image of the god Itztli (“Obsidian Knife”), who instead of a face has a knife, can be “reduced” to a drawing of this telltale element alone. The maize god, Centeotl, recognized by the corn cobs in his headdress, also appears in the form of a bird claw with corn cobs and maize flowers (fig. 8a). Mictlantecuhtli, the god of the Underworld, is always represented as either a single large bone or a total skeletal form (fig. 8b). Another example of substitution based on synecdoche is found in the case of Tlalloc, the rain deity, who nearly always appears with a walking stick in the form of a snake (the symbol for lightning; Anders et al. 1994:158), where his

³³ According to Anders et al. (1994:98; 1993a:114, 233), the jade fish symbolizes something precious, for example a child.

image is reduced to just this element. Also the goddess Tlazolteotl, whose distinctive features are unspun cotton and a nose ornament in the shape of a crescent moon (Mikulska 2008a: 90-100), appears as just a ball of cotton with the symbol of a crescent moon (fig. 8c).

In the following two examples, the “hieroglyph” is not so much a representation of the particular features of the goddess, but rather of her names. Thus the water goddess Chalchiuhtlicue, whose name means “Her Skirt of Green Precious Stones,” takes the form of the image of a green-blue skirt with a jade jewel above it.³⁴ This mode of representation amounts to a very similar (if not identical) process in the Maya writing system (logographic-syllabic). In contrast, it is worth observing the representation of the name of the Nahuatl solar god Piltzintecuhtli, “Noble Lord” (noun *pilli*, “noble” + reverential *tzin* + noun *tecuhtli*, “lord”). If this name had been rendered by means of a logographic process, there might have been a drawing of the glyph for a turquoise diadem, which is the popular way of representing the word *tecuhtli* (“lord”)³⁵ with another graphic element referring to a *pilli*.³⁶ Nevertheless, the “hieroglyph” consists of “an adornment of feathers and knots, indicative of the title of ‘noble prince’” (Anders et al. 1994:146), undoubtedly related to nobility but here functioning as a metonymic substitute.



Fig. 8c. The fertility goddess, Tlazolteotl, in an anthropomorphic form (with unspun cotton and a crescent moon nose ornament) and as a ball of cotton with the symbol of a crescent moon. *Cospi Codex* (lam. 7). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

Accumulation

The feature of accumulation of elements with meaning, characteristic of the pictographic expression found in the *tonalamatl* codices, appears not to have been analyzed by researchers. As a first example, the graphic motif termed *tlaquaquallo* may be useful. It is made up of signs of parts of the human body: skulls, hands, feet, eyes, bones, deflated lungs, and blood. Even though it is not necessary for all these elements to appear, it is important that there should be at least two

³⁴ The same thing happens with the graphic representation of the name Tepeyollotl, “Heart of the Mountain,” and in this case a human representation of the involved deity does not even exist.

³⁵ Cp. Olivier 2008:268. Cp. also the graphic representations of the name Motecuhzoma (“the Angry Lord”) in various codices—for example, in the *Telleriano-Remensis Codex* the names of the rulers Huehue Motecuhzoma (fol. 34v) and Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin (fol. 41r), or this second name found in the *Primeros Memoriales* (fol. 51v).

³⁶ Because of the almost certain provenance of the *Cospi Codex* from the volcanic region of Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl, its formulation in a Nahuatl-speaking region can be assured (Anders et al. 1994:93).

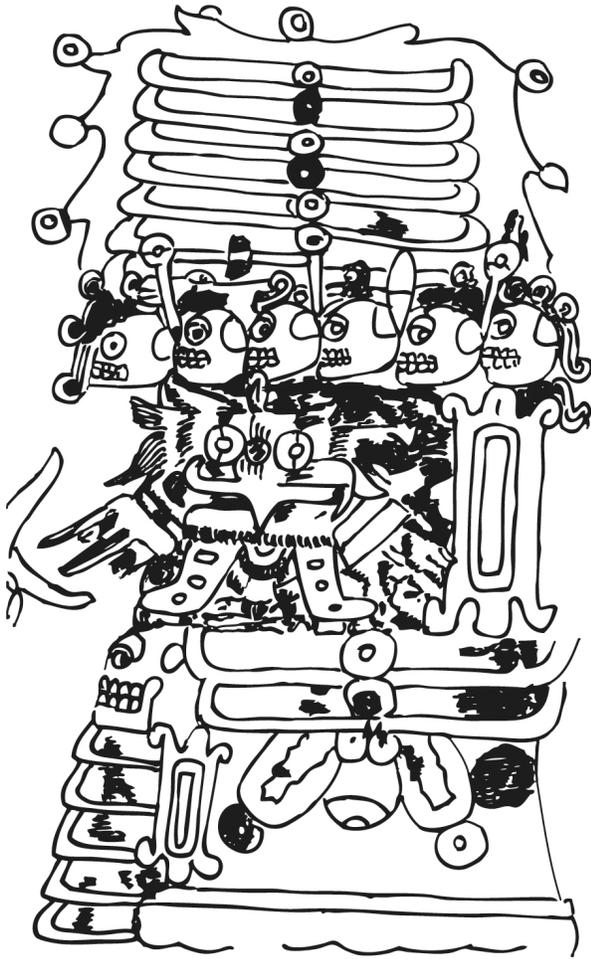


Fig. 9a. The temple of South (related to the Place of the Dead) decorated with *tlatlaquallo* elements. *Cospi Codex* (lam. 13). Redrawn by Katarzyna Mikulska Dąbrowska.

of them. This assembly is characteristic—or even distinctive—of the deities from the Underworld (especially the god Mictlantecuhtli and his feminine counterpart, Mictecacihuatl), where nearly all the dead go. These gods are normally represented in the form of skeletons (or at least with their heads depicted as skulls), frequently with the heart hanging between the lungs; they may also wear necklaces made of hands, hearts, and skulls.³⁷ The signs constituting the *tlatlaquallo* motif are mostly found in temples or thrones particular to these deities. Although these signs may be “decorated” with only two or three such elements, for example bones and blood (*Borgia Codex*, 13) or ribs, blood, and hearts (70), more often nearly all of them appear (*Cospi Codex*, 13; **fig. 9a**).

In the spoken language, the body parts just mentioned correspond to lexemes of certain diphrasisms signifying “human being,” but emphasizing different human qualities. The following expressions exist: *in ixtli in yollotl* [the face/eye, the heart], which emphasizes “the external part of the person” and the understanding; *in ixtli in tentli* [the face/eye, the mouth], with “emphasis on the intellectual capacities of the person: perception and capacity for communication”;

in yollo in nacayo [the heart, the flesh of the human body], with a more physical and emotional connotation; and *in omiŋ in nacatl* [the bone, the flesh], again with a more physical connotation but focused on strength (Montes de Oca 2000:135-44). The most frequent diphrasism is *in maitl in ixciŋl* [the hand, the foot], which by referring to the most external parts of the human body “integrates a totality and in this way represents the human being” (137).³⁸ Besides this aspect, the

³⁷ Cf. the monumental sculpture of Cihuacoatl in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City and the representations of beings, named *tzitzimime* in the *Tudela* and *Magliabechiano* codices, fols. 46 and 76r, respectively.

³⁸ The lexemes “hand” and “foot” are also directly related to the number twenty because of the obvious link to the number of fingers and toes, even though the significance of this lexical pair is also derived from the idea that “the foot and the hand refer to constitutive parts that make up the whole” (Montes de Oca 2000:137-38). It is worth indicating that in the K’iche’ Indian ritual texts, Craveri has collected many examples of the diphrasism *aqan q’ab* [the foot, the hand] that signify “human being,” focusing on human possibility and necessity for interaction with the community (see Craveri 2004:122-23, 205-06, 246-47).



Fig. 9b. Dead man devoured by a skeletal deity, with a recipient with *tlaquaquallo* elements on its side. *Borgia Codex* (lam. 57). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

lexemes of this last expression also indicate what the food for the Lords of the Underworld consists of: “Mictlantecuhtli, Mictēcacihuatl, there in Mictlan³⁹ they eat *feet* and *hands*,”⁴⁰ even though the meal also includes hearts: “he eats *hearts* in Mictlan.”⁴¹ It is evident that in this case we have a metaphorical description of the “menu” of the Underworld deities, even if the central idea is that they concentrate on stripping the flesh from the human remains after death (Mikulska 2007a:22, 2008a:288-91). Thus one of the names for Mictlan is *Ximohuayan* (cp. Castillo 2001 [1908]:117), the “place for stripping off flesh,” and that is why the contemporary Nahuatl of the Sierra Norte de Puebla say “*Talocan*⁴² gives us food, then *Talocan* eats us” (Knab 1991:41-42).

An excellent graphic manifestation of this idea is found on page 57 of the *Borgia Codex*, where a dead man is being devoured by a skeletal deity from the Place of the Dead, while to one side there is a receptacle containing the heart, the deflated lungs, and the eyes (fig. 9b). In the same way, the previously mentioned necklaces made of hands, hearts, and skulls, as affirmed by Montes de Oca (2000:439), represent an excellent example of visually conveyed diphrasisms by illustrating the parts that correspond to lexemes or to only one of these, precisely as occurs here. Given that the necklace of the deity represented is made up of human hands and hearts, they should therefore correspond to the two different diphrasisms—*in maitl in icxtil* [hand, foot] and *in ixtli in yollotl* [face/eye, heart], both symbolizing a person although in different ways. My idea is that the *tlaquaquallo* design is nothing other than the graphic representation of various lexemes comprising the diphrasisms that symbolize “human being” (although they perhaps refer more to the human body). Similarly, the expressive freedom of the *tlacuilo* (“painter/writer” of the codex) may be observed both in the quantity of elements drawn (accumulation) as well as in the way they are depicted. Thus one of the “divination scenes” that accompanies the

³⁹ Mictlan is the Nahuatl Underworld, and at the same time it is a Place of the Dead.

⁴⁰ In the original version: “Mictlantevuhtli, Mictēcacihuatl, in ompa quicua Mictlan *xocpalli, macpalli*” (Sahagún *PM* 1997:177; italics added). It is clear that in the original text the lexemes for this diphrasism take a different grammatical form (different from that found in the basic form, *in icxtil in maitl*), a fact that confirms that this is a diphrasism, given that its lexemes always appear in the same form (cp. Montes de Oca 2000:37-38).

⁴¹ “. . . *yollotli yn ompa quiqua mictlan*” (Sahagún *PM* 1997:177; italics added).

⁴² The name used by the contemporary Nahuatl from Puebla in reference to the Underworld, corresponding to the pre-Hispanic *Mictlan*.

Fig. 10. "Divination scenes" with *tlaquauallo* elements.

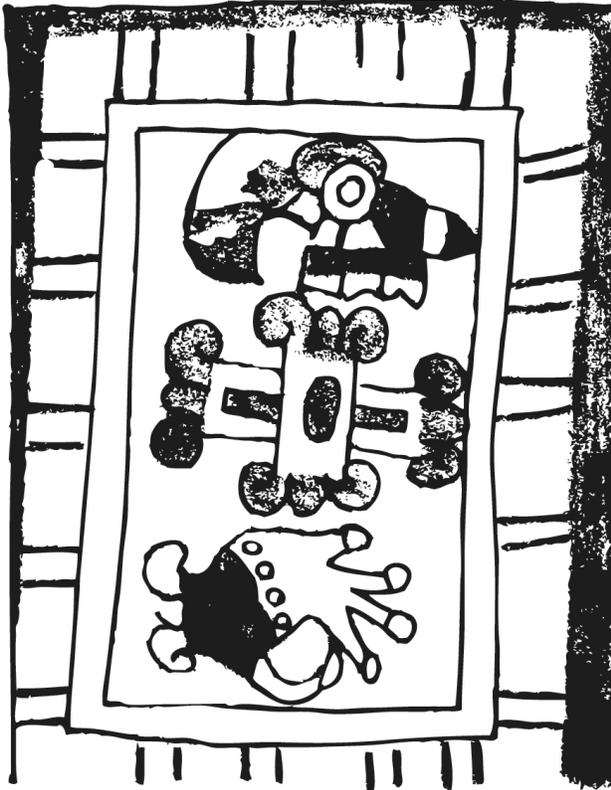


Fig. 10a. *Vaticanus B Codex* (lam. 7). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.



Fig. 10c. *Borgia Codex* (lam. 7). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

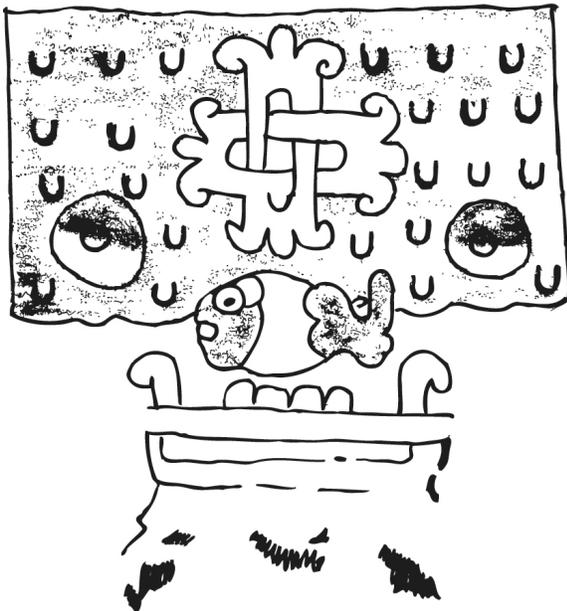


Fig. 10b. *Cospic Codex* (lam. 7). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

tonalpohualli tables is made up of images of parts of the human body. In the *Vaticanus B Codex* (7) it is a skull, two crossed bones, and a hand (**fig. 10a**), and in the *Cospic Codex* (7) crossed bones, a heart, eyes, and ribs⁴³ (**fig. 10b**). In both manuscripts these graphic elements are presented one beside the other. On the other hand, in the *Borgia Codex* (7), the elements of *tlaquauallo* are found superimposed one on top of the other, in such a way that someone not accustomed to this mode of presenting visual signs might have difficulty identifying them. Additionally, in this scene there are presentations of all the possible components of the *tlaquauallo* design: a skull, two large crossed bones, extracted eyeballs, ribs, a heart, deflated lungs, and blood (**fig. 10c**).

⁴³ The depiction of the lungs painted below the ribs may be missing because this part of the manuscript is badly damaged.

Fig. 11. Graphic representations of blood (the red color is marked with grey).

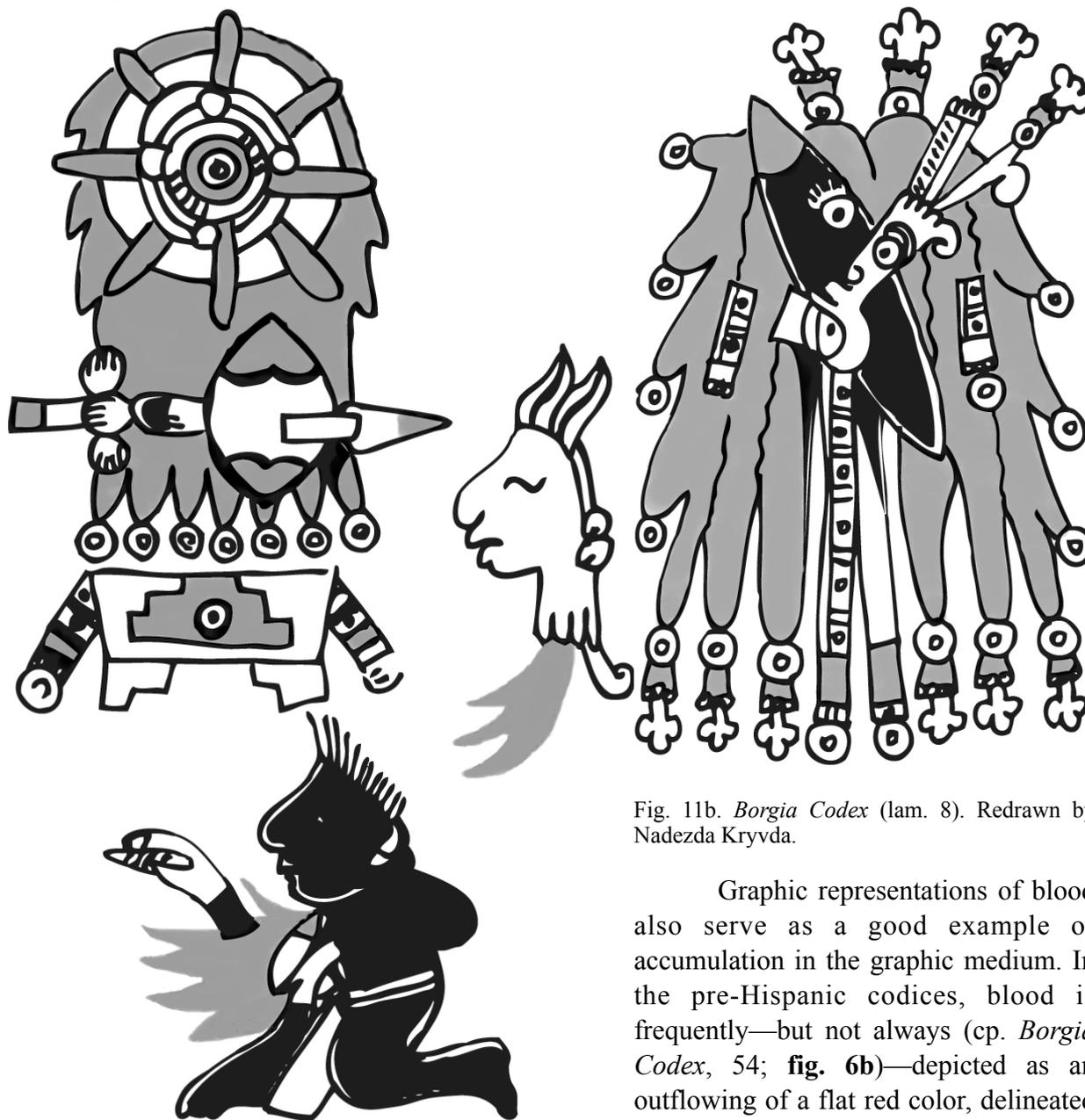


Fig. 11a. *Borgia Codex* (lam. 48). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

Fig. 11b. *Borgia Codex* (lam. 8). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

contrast to the European or Europeanized indigenous convention (Batalla Rosado 1994:48-49). At times, the image of blood looks very much like a representation of water,⁴⁴ also painted as a river but blue in color and decorated with two concentric circles and little pointed snail. The flow of blood may also be “adorned” with such circles but in a variety of colors: white, yellow, and green (depending on the manuscript). According to Reyes Valerio (*apud* Batalla Rosado 1994:48), these concentric circles are representations of *chalchihuitl*, “green, precious

Graphic representations of blood also serve as a good example of accumulation in the graphic medium. In the pre-Hispanic codices, blood is frequently—but not always (cp. *Borgia Codex*, 54; **fig. 6b**)—depicted as an outflowing of a flat red color, delineated by a black line (48; **fig. 11a**), and it does not stain what it touches, in

⁴⁴ According to Batalla Rosado (1994:48), the representation of blood derives from that of water.

stone” (**fig. 11a and b**), in this way extending the significance of blood towards *chalchihuatl*, “precious liquid.” The image in the sign for *xochitl*, or “flower,” should be interpreted in a similar way, as substituting for the “precious stone” (Dibble *apud* Batalla Rosado 1994:49). Nevertheless, there are also cases in which both elements appear at the same time (*Cospi Codex*, 11; *Borgia Codex*, 8; **fig. 11b**). This accumulation can be even more extensive. For example, in the *Borgia Codex* the image of blood is enriched by “circular stones and blocks of jade and some

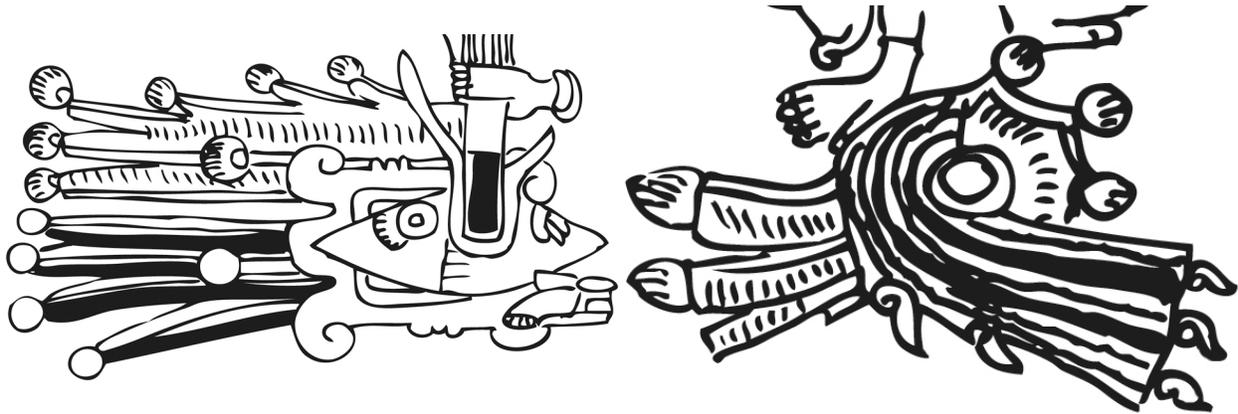


Fig. 12a-b. Graphic representations of water as precious liquid, with two different signs meaning “gold”. *Borgia Codex* (lam. 50). Redrawn by Katarzyna Mikulska Dąbrowska.

small circles that possibly represent gold” (44; Batalla Rosado 2008a:433).⁴⁵ Signs that indicate “preciousness” with depictions of blood may be replaced fairly frequently by others indicating excrement, but painted in yellow color (*Borgia Codex*, 1, 17, 50, 54, 69) and therefore signifying *teocuitlatl*, “divine excrement” (cp. Batalla Rosado 2008a:339, 366, 450, 459, 481). Given that this word is a lexicalized diphthysm meaning “gold,” it seems to be another way of transmitting the meaning “precious liquid.” In fact, on page 50 of the *Borgia Codex* (**fig. 12a-b**), two images appear that assuredly confirm the possibility of an exchange of parts: these are two gushes painted in a spiral (certainly referring to “war”), one of fire (yellow with feather circles) and the other of water, painted first with yellow jewels (**fig. 12a**), and again with the *teocuitlatl* (**fig. 12b**) in both cases indicating “gold.”

The last example of accumulation that I present here consists of the representations of “sacred pots.” These are receptacles—vases, burners, or sacrificial plates—used for “communication between human beings and supernatural powers,” serving as the “vehicle and connection” between the two worlds. They were used to offer the blood of (personal) sacrifice, in order that the gods should eat and be strong and in return should provide maize and other food products for humankind (Jansen 2002:313-14). In this way, the basic sequence of life and death was created, the “motor” of Mesoamerican existence. The “god pot” thus provided this “communication link” between gods and men. Hallucinatory substances were often kept therein

⁴⁵ In the *Borbonicus Codex* (20), there is also an example in which water is depicted, even though it certainly represents blood, and according to Dibble (*apud* Batalla Rosado 1994:49), “here a water ditch is made to represent blood; this is a metonymic device.”

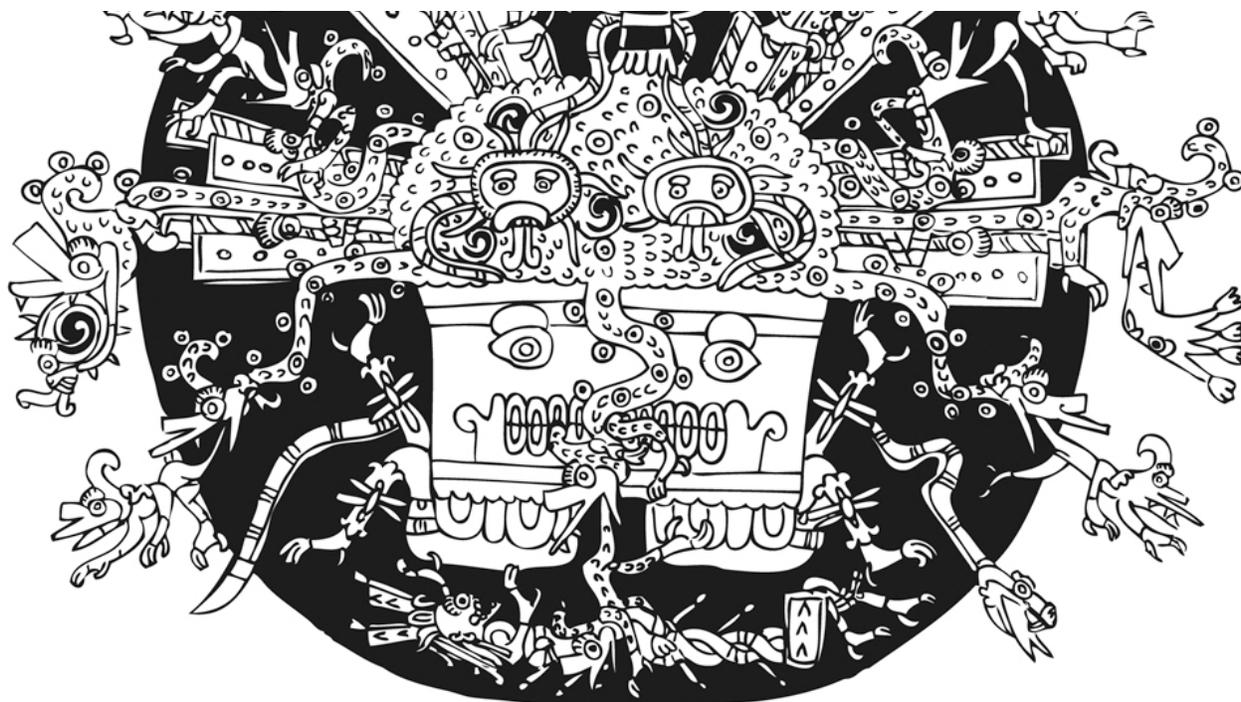


Fig. 13. The “god pot” with the face in form of skull, and with legs and arms opened on both sides. *Borgia Codex* (lam. 29). Redrawn by Katarzyna Mikulska Dąbrowska.



Fig. 14a. Graphic representation of “god pot.” *Borgia Codex* (lam. 31). Redrawn by Katarzyna Mikulska Dąbrowska.

(302-14), possibly the famous *teotlacualli* (“divine food”) described by Diego Durán (1984 [1967]:i, 51-52). A magnificent graphic representation of this idea is found on page 29 of the *Borgia Codex* (fig. 13), the beginning of an extraordinary passage in this codex that is interpreted by the majority of researchers⁴⁶ as representing a series of rituals.⁴⁷ According to the interpretation of Jansen (2002:302-06), at the center of the image in question is a pot containing black hallucinatory ointment, with a person superimposed on top who is bleeding from his virile member as he threads a rope through it. The drug, together with the pain, bring on a visionary experience, graphically illustrated in the form of “wind serpents and the night,” in fact the same images already observed in the graphic representation of the

⁴⁶ See for example the interpretations by Anders et al. (1993a:175-245), Jansen (2002:284), Batalla Rosado (2008a:407-41), as well as others mentioned by Boone (2007:171-73).

⁴⁷ Note that Boone (2007:171-210) interprets these unique pages from the *Codex Borgia* (29-47) as a cosmological series.

diphrasism *in yohualli in ehecatl*, which, according to Jansen, gives meaning to the “mysterious and intangible.”

In the same codex are other visual representations of these divine vases (cp. images 31, 38, 42, 46, 47, 57; **fig. 14a**), some of which are commented on by Jansen. Thus in image 31 a small human figure with a skeletal body (representing “a spirit from the Other World”) emerges from the blood spilled from a sacrificed being. To the right of this being, two priestesses receive the “spirit” and give him a bath in a “sacred pot.” Then, to the left of the central being, from the same “sacred pots” sprout maize plants, leading Jansen to conclude that “here, the magical



Fig. 14b. Graphic representation of “god pot.” *Borgia Codex* (lam. 32). Redrawn by Katarzyna Mikulska Dąbrowska.

transformation of death into life takes place, symbolized by the corn cobs that sprout from Cihuacoatl’s body” (2002:310). In a similar way, in image 32 of the *Borgia Codex* (**fig. 14b**) there is another “god pot” with an anthropomorphized sacrificial knife—the god *Itzli*—in the middle of the “patio in front of the temple . . . [where] the darkness of the night still reigns” (311), so that the divine vase appears to be placed in a temple of obscurity or in other words in a *Tlillan*, in the same way as in image 29. Without going into detailed interpretation of the entire representation, for present purposes it is sufficient to note that once again the main theme concerns a personal sacrifice bringing on a visionary experience (313).

Having introduced the general symbolism found in “god pots,” I will now define their representation. Not all the “god pots” are painted in the same way as those in the *Codex Borgia*,⁴⁸ where they always appear anthropomorphized, or in the form of a skull with eyes and the famous “Mictlantecuhtli eyebrows” (cp. Batalla Rosado 2008a:339, 352, 355), as well as the fleshless jaw (figs. 13-14a-b). According to Jansen (2002:306), in this way “his relationship with the Lord of death is indicated and probably his capacity to cross the border between the world of the living and the dead, or between mortals and divine beings.” Effectively, these images appear to represent a common image for the face of the skeletal god from the Underworld. The fact that the Underworld is also a place of creation (Mikulska 2008a:225-38; 2008b:152-64) confirms Jansen’s interpretation. In addition, the “god pot” from image 29 has other added elements, which, taking into account their form and colors, appear to represent the stylized image of a heart hanging between deflated lungs, in the style common for bony gods of Mictlan. Certainly, the *tlacuilo* could have added more significant elements here because he had enough space on the sheet of the codex. Nevertheless, the image is a good example of accumulation.

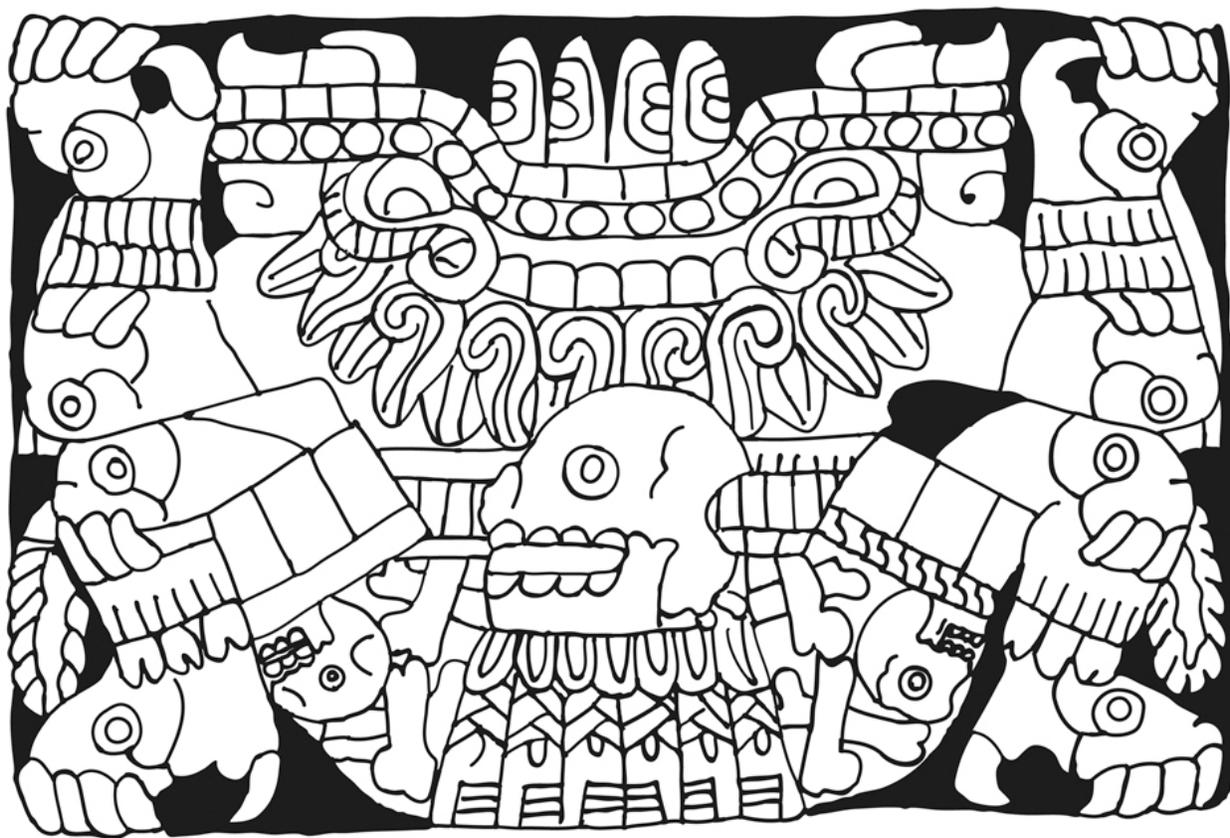


Fig. 15a. Earth in monster form, painted with arms and legs open. Image on the base of so called Hakmack Box. Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

⁴⁸ Observe the other “god pots” analyzed by Jansen (2002:305-313): 1) the sarcophagus stone of Pakal; 2) a tripod plate of Ocotelulco with the face of the ancient priest Tezcatlipoca; 3) an image in the mural painting from Ocotelulco, almost the same as on page 32 of the *Borgia Codex*; and 4) an urn from Tomb 5 of Cerro de las Minas (Huajuapán) with the image of a pot full of ground tobacco in the hands of a man “on the point of shamanic flight.”

The “god pot” is painted with legs and arms open on both sides, ending in claws (**fig. 13**). This posture is described by the German researcher Eduard Seler as *mamazouhticac* (“with the arms and legs open”; 1963 [1904]:ii, 15) or the “terrestrial toad” (i, 124, 147; ii, 14-15, 42-43, 46, 241), which is particular to the earth (**fig. 15a**)⁴⁹ and to the terrestrial deities, among whom should be mentioned not only Cihuacoatl and Mictecacihuatl, but also the goddesses Tlazolteotl (**fig. 15b**), Mayahuel, and Xochiquetzal. In the religious calendars these are usually presented as images of the earth in monster form (which in my opinion refers to the earth’s surface; see Mikulska 2008a:150-56, 187-95), but by taking an anthropomorphic form its meaning changes to the interior of the earth or Cihuacoatl (Jansen 2002, Mikulska 2008a:190). Correspondingly, it is notable how metaphorical descriptions of the earth and of sorcerers correspond to the “visual manifestation” of this concept: “stretched out with her head facing upwards,” “lying face down.”⁵⁰

This is undoubtedly the position for giving birth (cp. *Borbonicus Codex*, sheet 13; **fig. 15b**) and coitus.⁵¹ This graphic symbolism refers to the reproductive act, fertility, and also the lustfulness of the earth and other beings who display this characteristic. The gods mentioned stand out because of their fecundity or as being lustful for corporeal love, thus assuring the abundant fertility of the earth. Similarly, the claws in the representations of the earth—which in other instances are accompanied by fangs and a fleshless face—indicate the



Fig. 15b. The fertility goddess Tlazolteotl, giving birth. *Borbonicus Codex* (lam. 13). Redrawn by Nadezda Kryvda.

⁴⁹ Above all, the sculptures of the earth in this posture have received a great deal of attention from researchers (cp. Nicholson 1963-64, Baquedano 1993, Gutiérrez Solana 1990, and Matos Moctezuma 1997, among others), but they are also found in the codices of the calendar-religious type (for example in *Borgia* (29-31, 32, 39-46), *Telleriano-Remensis* (f. 20r), *Vaticanus Ríos* (f. 29r); cp. Mikulska 2008a:150-56, 2007b: 263-90).

⁵⁰ In certain of these representations of the earth (for example in the relief at the base of the “Cihuacoatl monumental” and on the Bilimek Vase), the date 1-Rabbit also appears.

⁵¹ This interpretation was first suggested by Eduard Seler (1963 [1904]:i, 120).

malevolent, destructive, and dangerous aspects of the earth as the devourer of the dead. Because of this network of meaning, “the posture ‘of the toad’ refers to the earth, which in its interior contains the beginnings of life, but also claims back that which previously emerged as a living thing, then returning dead” (Mikulska 2008a:194). Thus in the previously mentioned image of the “god pot” on page 32, the god Itztli, “Knife,” is presented in this posture (**fig. 14b**).

In this interpretation, as made evident in the case of the “god pots” and the images of the earth, the concern is with something that permits transition between the human and the divine or supernatural world, or that marks the sacred transformation between life and death. In the case of the earth it is more obvious, but the “god pots” inspire more arguments, emphasizing their creative function or connotation. An example is the myth referring to the creation of humans, who were understood as being made by using the bones of previous generations, “ground up by Quilachtli, who is also Cihuacoatl, who created them forthwith in a beautiful glazed bowl” (*Leyenda de los Soles*, Tena 2002:179; cp. Mendieta 1993 [1870]:78 and Torquemada 1986 [1615]:ii, 121).

The linguistic expression that best corresponds to this idea of the “god pots” is the diphthysm *in toptli*, *in petlacalli*, or “the coffer, the reed chest.” According to López Austin (1996 [1980]:i, 382), this expression refers to the idea of a secret, whereas for Montes de Oca (2000:259) “it makes reference to a secret place, out of the view of humans, with the function . . . of hiding something valuable so that it may be preserved.” According to López Austin, this metaphor also corresponds to the Tlalloc pot,⁵² that is, the pot that is inside the mountain (personal communication 2002), within which are engendered the mysteries of life. In other words, the dead arrive there, as indicated in multiple fragments from the *huehuetlatolli* of the *Florentine Codex*. For example: *ca otoconmotoptemilli*, *ca otoconmopetlacaltemili* (Sahagún *CF* 1950-82:vi, 21): “you went inside the coffer, you went inside the reed chest.” Another example is the following, speaking of the dead (195):

. . . in oquinpolo, in oquintlali totecujō, in vevetque, in ilamatque, [...]
ca oquinmotlatili in totecujō, â ca oquinmotoptemili, ca
oquinmopetlacaltemili, ca oquinmihoali. In atlan in oztoc in mictlan

“. . . whom our Lord [destroyed, he hid them], [the old men, the old women] ‘the ancestors’ [...]; Our Lord put them inside [the coffer, the reed chest], sending them [into the water, into the cave] into Mictlan”

On the other hand, this same place—or the same recipients—contain within them the germs of life (agreeing perfectly with the concept of the Underworld/fleshless beings, who are also the source of creation, all of which coincides with the concept of “Tlalloc’s pot,” as López Austin states). Here we find the child about to be born (Sahagún *CF* 1950-82:vi, 138):

⁵² As rightly argued by José Contel (2008:164-65); in spite of the widely accepted etymology suggested by Thelma Sullivan (1974), the name of this god continues to be written as Tlaloc, whereas it comes from *tlal-lo* (“covered with earth”), an etymology that supports its being written with a double l.

*quenami ic quimapanilia in totecujō in piltontli in conetontli: ca
itoptzin ca ipetlacaltzin in totecujō*

“How does Our Lord swaddle [the little child, the little kid]? Into his
coffer, into his reed chest, of Our Lord”⁵³

And here we find the source of life (80):

*in nican tictlapoain toptli in petlacalli in mixpan chayauī in
ticcecenmana in timomoiaoa*

“here, you open [the coffer, the reed chest] and spill before you, sowing
and scattering seed”⁵⁴

For all of the reasons given, I believe that the concept of the “god pot” is much more closely associated with the earth, marking the boundary between the divine and human worlds and also being the “place” where the mystery of life is engendered, a magical transformation from one state to another. Viewed from this perspective, the graphic representation of the “god pot,” enriched with the elements of the face and body of the skeletal god of the Underworld with legs and arms open, can be perfectly understood. It also provides an excellent example of the accumulation of signified elements.

Conclusions

Examples of these “graphic manifestations” could be multiplied, considering that in the *tonalamatl* codices almost no simple images are found; all contain expansive semiotic information that—in spite of our ever greater understanding of the content—still leaves us with questions to be explored. Nevertheless, I believe it is possible to affirm that in the Nahua culture oral expression of magical-religious type, termed *nahuallatolli*, has its parallel in the graphic form, *nahualicuilolli*, even though the latter does not constitute a direct transcription of oral expression. This analysis coincides perfectly with the thesis of Patrick Johansson that there is a “pictographic discourse, parallel to oral discourse, that manifests its own form of expression” (2004:44). Considering Nahua graphic expression specifically, Johansson states that “image in the codices . . . constitutes a mnemonic backup for oral expression, where the word feeds and in turn is tinted by varying semiotic content, in terms of expressive nuances, which at times are conserved only in circumstances of oral elocution”(1994:305).

Given this situation, both the *nahuallatolli* and *nahualicuilolli* registers have their own rhetorical models suitable for a particular context, even though in both cases certain characteristic features of oral expression are evident: abundance and at times communicative

⁵³ My translation is based on the Spanish version of Montes de Oca (2000:259).

⁵⁴ See note 53.

redundancy, accumulation of significant elements, freedom concerning their composition, along with the presence of diphrasisms. Whereas the *nahuallatolli* appear to contain more metaphors and paraphrases, in the *nahualicuilolli* there are more visual metonyms and instances of synecdoche. The aim of both registers is undoubtedly to expand meaning and make it more profound—a poetic function—while at the same time communicating a more complete and more dynamic vision of the divine realm. This assertion derives from the fact that many diphrasisms were undoubtedly very widely disseminated and that both registers qualified as *nahual*-, “masked” or “disguised,” and follow these patterns of orality. Nevertheless, the fact of classifying them as hidden, together with the data indicating rivalry among those who intended to use them, lead one to believe that they were completely understood only by the initiated few. Thus meaning was not directly communicated; mystery and imprecision assure magical function, maintaining the particular ambiguity inherent in the oracles.

It is very important to stress that the system for transmitting information in graphic form in Central Mexico provides the possibility of expression through varied registers, of which the *nahualicuilolli* is undoubtedly the most complex. In spite of its complexity, this register reflects characteristic patterns of oral communication, although once more I reiterate that these patterns are adapted for this specific medium of communication and not necessarily totally parallel to oral expression. The question remains as to whether this system—with its great potential as a form of expression, ranging from graphic representations of diphrasisms (or *digraphisms*) to the inclusion of a huge repertoire of “visual rhetorical resources”—should be classified only as “iconography.”

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